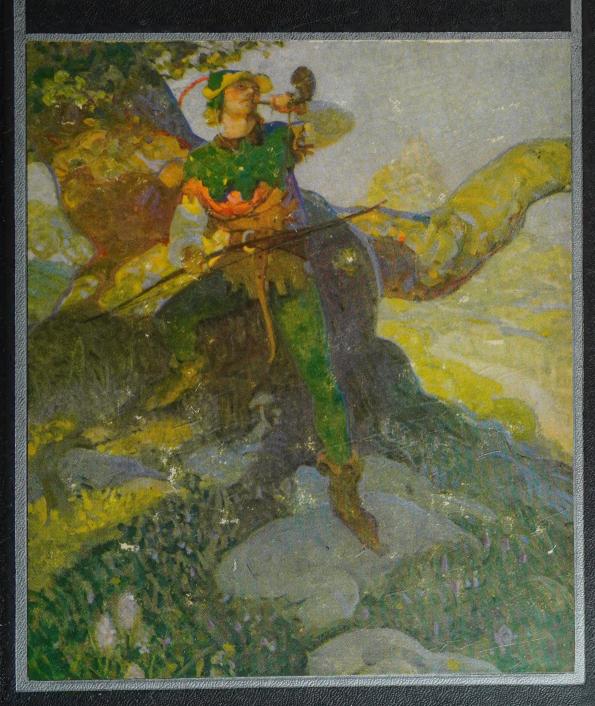
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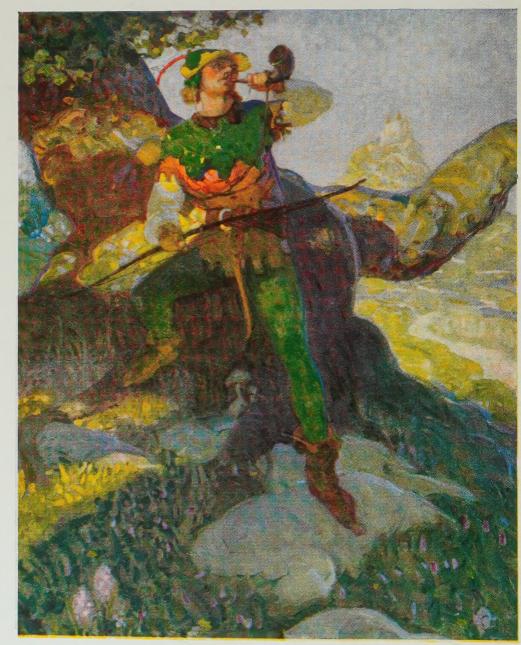






Henry Roberts
2132 Woodland ave
Duluth Minn.

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Robin Hood

ROBIN TOOS

By Goith Heal, with an introduction by Philip Allen

DAN CONTENT



RAND MONALLY & COMPANY

NEW YORK

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To my Mother and Father





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Ghe Introduction

Since Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and Charles Kingsley's *Hereward*, the world has had no such portrait of Saxon outlawry in medieval England as the one painted by Miss Heal in this book. It has been my good fortune now and then to watch the author while she worked at her picture. I have been asked to give my impressions regarding it.

The only real material for a story of Robin Hood and his Merry Men is buried in thirty popular ballads which tell in rude fashion of the doings of this outlaw band. Now these verses were not written down until five hundred years after the historical events they pretend to describe. They are therefore untrustworthy. They are of only the slightest dramatic value. They do not tell a connected story, but are pure episodes carelessly strung together like the beads on a child's necklace. They are full of silly contradictions and fail to make their characters convincing.

Miss Heal's first task, therefore, was a double one: to weave a plot which brought in every ballad in its logical

order; to make relive Robin Hood, Little John, Friar Tuck, and other main figures which the ballads had cut all out of a single piece of cloth. To this end she created a sure background of social and political England in the twelfth century. Thus she discards the tale that outlaws Robin Hood for his childish killing of the king's deer, and in its stead puts the story of a hero who voluntarily lives outside that Norman law which is destroying his Saxon nation. Thus she lays aside the pseudo-Robin who is only the Earl of Huntingdon in romantic disguise and who plays the cavalier to Maid Marian, and in his stead adopts the lowly but pure-minded Saxon orphan who serves in all things his liege-lady, the Virgin Mary. By this one flash of artistic insight Miss Heal has mightily added to the human truth and depth of her romance.

Robin Hood is portraved from the moments of his childhood when the later man is most definitely in the making. Influences are indicated which stamp their indelible imprint on the sensitive mind of our young hero: the murder of Becket. King Henry, the death of Robin's father, soldier-life in France. the immortal beauty of great cathedrals there. And the other outlaws are dowered with living, gracious traits of mental rather than physical expression-Midge, sensitive boyishness; Will Stutely, happy-go-lucky irresponsibility; Friar Tuck, unblemished gayety; Will Scarlet, forgivably vain but in love with beauty; Little John, slow to start, deliberate in action, but fine in every least nerve of his being. Robin himself is the essence of a contented and sturdy mind that triumphs easily over bodily shortcomings. To throw into sharp relief these characteristics of her beloved vagabonds. Miss Heal has banked about them a whole gallery of original figures who show by contrast and by comment what their world thinks of the outlaws of Sherwood.

Three Norman kings command the interest of Robin Hood's day: Henry and Richard and John. The tragedy

of Henry's career—the slaying of Becket—begins Miss Heal's romance. The dramatic incidents of Richard's reign are included in her book: the Crusade, the imprisonment of Coeur de Lion, his recapture of the fortresses occupied by John. Nor are the spectacular deeds of the false brother overlooked in our story: John's attempt on the English throne, his endeavor to continue Richard's durance in Austria, his relations with the queen-mother, famous Eleanor of Aquitaine, and his definite defeat on Richard's return. Other political matters that the story touches, to enliven, are the persecution of the Jews, the outlawry of Hereward and his unavailing fight against Norman oppression, the old Saxon people's court Witenagemot, laws dealing with the hunt, laws relating to fairs, and actual excerpts from charters and documents read by John regarding Nottingham.

The social background of Miss Heal's conjuring portrays vividly the unworldly love felt alike by both commoner and noble of the twelfth century for the Queen of Heaven and for the Recovery of the Savior's Tomb from the Infidel. Henry Adams, in his glorious book called Mont St. Michel and Chartres, has not presented the dynamic quality of this Mary Worship more convincingly than our author. Actual events recorded in her romance are the building of Newstead Abbey by King Henry, the things described in connection with the abbeys of Fountains Dale and Whitby. Her cathedrals of Canterbury, Chartres, and Mont St. Michel are authentic, as is her picture of the parish priest and the performance of his office. Numerous religious songs, all translated from medieval Latin, and the carol of The Virgin used as a recurrent refrain in the latter half of her book (specially rendered into English by Howard Mumford Jones) add insistent truth to the story.

The literary fabric of Miss Heal's Robin Hood depends upon the legends of the time: King Arthur, Sir Perceval, The Grail, Tristram and Iseult. It contains lays translated from

the troubadour songs of early Provence, from French pastourelles; verse from Caedmon, and the prison plaint (reputedly) written by Richard Yea and Nay. It includes all proverbs built by the English folk around the name of Robin. It uses the vehicle of folk-balladry to portray the manners and customs of common life in the twelfth century, as well as to typify butchers, beggars, potters, bishops, sailors, sheriffs, and all manner of tradespeople and noblemen who lived in that far-off day.

. . . Will her reader love a Robin Hood that is not just the rough, gay, dauntless outlaw of the Open Road? A Robin that does not knock out every enemy with bare fist and leave him to die in a forest covert, but loses many a fight and vet wins over his opponent unfailingly by his very good sportsmanship? This is a nice question, but I have every faith that Miss Heal's Robin will conquer youth as it has conquered me. For I want my hero noble in the larger sense, like the convincing figures from Fielding and Stevenson. from Dumas and Victor Hugo-I wish him, like Miss Heal's Robin, not to kill, but to aid the poor, to uphold a great national cause, to worship his Lady in Heaven by living a merry life and not by walling himself within a cloister. I want the Robin that twenty-odd generations of Englishmen have adored, him who upholds the richest and deepest memories of our past. And such a Robin has been brought to me by Miss Heal.

Dear young friends, may I have the very real pleasure of introducing him to you?

PHILIP SCHUYLER ALLEN

Book the first



ROBIN TOOOS

BIRTH OF AN OUTLAW

FOR ENGLAND AND THE SAXONS



LL along the winding road from Sandwich to Canterbury flocked the sturdy men of England. It was as if time had turned back to an eve before the victory of the Normans who had invaded the land a century before. In the joyous frenzy of shouting there

was an echo of the forgotten independence and freedom of the Anglo-Saxon. No proud Norman galloped his horse recklessly down the road this day, sending the peasants scampering into the bushes like frightened rabbits. No man of wealth or rank flung jeering commands at the lines of tradesmen and artisans blocking the highway. No knight or dignitary stained the road with his crimson cloak. Those who formed the pushing, jostling procession that poured from the streets of Canterbury wore the browns and grays of the workmen of England. But the blue of their eyes and the bleached fair hair surmounting their bronzed faces proclaimed them pure descendants of the soil of England. No blood save that of the staunch Anglo-Saxon ran in their veins. The stamp of their

nobility did not lie in their French names, their purchased castles, their power to use whip and sword. It lay in their proud bearing, in the unfettered spirit that persisted in spite of their captive lives.

Suddenly in the far distance a white cloud of dust arose. The cries of the Saxons swelled to a mighty volume—a singing, reverberating tune of victory. In the crushing mass of people surging forward, a slim boy clung to the rough hand of his father to keep from being swept away. The two might have been drawn by the same hand save for the amazing difference in their expressions. The blue eyes of the older man shone with emotion. From time to time he muttered in the rugged Saxon tongue "The savior of England hath come home. The serf is unbound." The boy wriggled uncomfortably as the hot bodies of men touched him. His eves were full of tears as he looked pleadingly at the man who watched the road. Puzzled and questioning, he asked, "What is it? What is it? Why do we stand here on the highway? What dost thou seek, Father?"

Even as he spoke the white cloud disappeared in the bottom of the V of two hills. The next hilltop it would reach was their own. The loud cries seemed to ebb to a deep sighing like the summer wind in a wheat field, the song of the sea, the rushing of birds' wings. The child followed the example of the men about him. His eyes sought the hilltop. His quivering, tired body grew taut with expectation. The white cloud had reached the top and moved no farther. Gradually it disappeared, and against the red glow of the late afternoon sun a horseman was painted in black. The accompanying attendants leaped from their steeds and knelt before the

horseman. The low murmur of peasants' voices ceased utterly. A reverent voice cut the silence: "Long live the savior of England—Thomas à Becket—archbishop of Canterbury—protector of all ye Saxons."

The spell was broken. The loud voices cried out in praise. The child's hand was wrenched from his father's. He was pushed with the other bystanders into the thickets to clear the road. He heard the beating of horses' hoofs coming down the hill. He saw the flushed faces of his townspeople. Was it laughter or weeping that came from their open mouths? Who was this man who must be greater than the powerful King Henry himself, for none would shout half so wildly for His Majesty were he passing. A wild desire possessed the child to follow the horsemen. Like a young squirrel he dropped to the ground, pushing his way out from the thickets to the highway. It seemed to him as if the world were a forest of legs around him, and each leg had a sandal that kicked him and jostled him. But his bright eyes sought for an opening through the throng, and in but a few seconds his golden head was burrowing between the leather leggings of a peasant into the fresh air of the open world. Even as a sob of excitement and relief broke from him, the pound of hoofs warned him of new danger. He leaped to his feet just as the rider of the oncoming horse veered away from him. He looked into the kind eyes of the horseman who had stood on the hilltop. The face that looked down on him was gray and worn. The boy's heart throbbed as he saw the tender smile on the stranger's lips, "Marry, little lad, thy eagerness came near being the death of thee."

[&]quot;Yes, Sire." The child hung his head.

[&]quot;And what, prithee, may thy name be?"

"Robert Hode, Sire," the boy answered, lifting his head a little.

"And do you know my name, Robert?" The man smiled down at the golden head.

"The savior of the Saxons," the boy cried bravely. The stranger leaned over until his hand reached the hand of young Robert. He was so near that Robert saw that his eyes were gray like the gray of his hair and his lined face. The boy saw the smiling mouth grow sad again and a low voice said to him: "England needs saviors and it is among the Saxons that they must be found."

Then Robert saw the horse leap forward toward Canterbury. The procession followed. The white cloud was going away from him carrying with it the gray man who must be greater than a king.

It took the small boy a long time to reach the town. The people had all run on ahead. He had lost his father. As he trudged along his troubled heart ached with the puzzle of it all. Why did the Saxons need a savior? And why would the savior be found among the Saxons? It seemed to him that a savior should be a knight, dressed in shining mail, or a lord in gold and ermine. Surely then, the savior was to be found among the Normans where they wore such things? But that was not what the man on the horse had said, "England needs saviors and it is among the Saxons they will be found."

There was something wrong in the town. There were too many lights. They changed the night into a blue dawn. The few golden lights were tinged green from the many blue torches. The boy's ears sensed a difference in the cries that reached him. The shouting on the

road that late afternoon had been a song of joy. The sound that reached him as he approached Canterbury was a never-ending moan. His sturdy legs carried him on the run into the center of the confusion. Everyone about him was crying. Someone must have died. Only then did women throw their aprons over their heads and men go about with grim faces. He knew. It was so when his dear mother had died not long ago. is it? What is it?" he cried, as he ran after the people. No one answered him. They hastened on toward the great cathedral door. By now the boy could not have stopped if he had wished. Again he was caught in a procession of his own people. Again he was the only one among them who did not know where he was going. Phrases came to his ears, but he could not find their meanings. "Foully murdered"-"They called him a traitor who troubled the kingdom and excited the English to revolt"—"The savior is dead."

Up the aisle the people went. Young Robert could not see beyond the bodies pushing in front of him. His heart beat wildly and he thought that perhaps he was in a great battle except that there were no swords. He wondered what he was to see when he reached the steps of the great altar. People were bending down over something. A man lay there. They kissed his feet and hands. They wept softly and stared at his uncovered face. The boy's heart seemed to stop. The man lying there was the horseman on the hill.

MORE THAN A BRAVE HEART

Down the lonely road leading away from the town of Canterbury two figures walked wearily. Here was silence. No weeping or shouting broke the peace of the night. While the town of Canterbury mourned the death of Thomas à Becket with burning torches, Robert and his father turned homeward. The hundred eves of night stared at the boy. His father had trained him to be unafraid—to love the thickets in dark as well as in light, to listen to the sounds of the forest with understanding. But tonight all was different. The events of the day had made familiar things unfamiliar. This rustling in the bushes—how it startled him, when on ordinary occasions he would have watched eagerly for the white streak of a frightened rabbit! This pale moonlight changing the road into silver sand! It was not his every-day world at all.

Their way now led into a deeper wood where trees arched over the road and shut out the sky. Father and son touched each other's hands for easier guidance. In the darkness they hid their sorrow from each other by deep silences. Robert knew this was the grown-up thing to do. Only children cried out their little hurts. Men kept their trouble locked within them. But the young boy felt he could bear it no longer. He was sad and puzzled. His head ached with the mystery of the man on the horse. He thought of his father's stern, unsmiling mouth and felt afraid to ask the questions that

teemed in his brain. And while he was wondering what to do, he heard his father's voice say:

"Thou hast seen a great man, Son. See that thou dost not forget this day."

"Never can I forget him, Father. I have seen the Savior of the Saxons."

"The people called him 'savior' in life. In death they will put saint before his name."

Robert tried hard to understand. Then the "Savior of the Saxons" was not the horseman's true name. It was just what the people called him. Perhaps his real name was an ordinary one like Robert Hode.

"What is his true name? Who then can he be, Father?"

"Where art thou, Robert? In dreamland?" The father's voice was stern. "All along the road the people were calling out to him. While thou wast grumbling to me to take thee home, the sound of his name rang forth on every side. But who didst thou think he was?"

"Why—was he, then, the King, Father?"

"Boy, boy, where are thy brains? The King goes through our midst uncheered. Thou knowest that King Henry loves not the Saxons."

"Was it, then, the sheriff, Father—or no, could it have been the outlaw Hereward? Could it have been — O Father, it was!"

"Hereward died these hundred years ago—died like this man, for England and the Saxons."

"But," faltered the boy, "could he not have come back on earth to save us again?"

"Perhaps his outraged ghost did come back, for Hereward was the first man who took arms against the victorious Normans who invaded our England. Thou rememberest, Son, how he gathered one hundred men about him; Winter, his brother-in-arms; Gheri, his cousin; Alfrik, Godwin, Leofwin, Torkill—all great strong men, so strong that if one of these met three Normans he refused not the combat, and the saying goes had there been four such as he in England the French would never have entered it."

"But, Father, who was the man on the horse?"

"The man on the horse was Thomas à Becket, the archbishop who chose to throw aside his rich vestments and make friends with the Saxons, he who has been in exile these seven years, whose cause will go down in history as that of the conquered against the Norman conquerors."

"The—the archbishop." The boy's head drooped. The silence between them was resumed. It was the silence of infinite understanding. These two had learned each other. Nights by a roaring fire where the boy's reveries reached his father through expressions that flitted across his sensitive face had made words unnecessary. The long days of a mother's illness had taught the son to read the suffering in his father's eyes. So now they knew that they had lived through a momentous event this day. Tragedy had touched their lives, and the song of the birds in the trees held a sadder note for them because of it.

The tall man lived again the moment when the archbishop met his death at the hands of the Normans in the great cathedral. He felt again the sharp pain of seeing his little son's face appear suddenly in the crowd, heard again the broken sob, "Why did he die?" He looked

down at the staunch little figure beside him. The moon-light gave the boy's face an unreal expression. His bronzed and rosy cheeks were pale. And the father saw that the shadows they had been in as they passed through the forest had hidden the tears in his son's eyes.

"What is it, boy? Why grievest thou?"

"He was the archbishop, Father."

"Well, little lad, why should that make thee weep?"

"But Father, I did not bow before him nor cross myself. I stood beside his horse while all the other people knelt."

"It matters not."

"But Father, always will I remember it. Before he died he must have thought that one Saxon had not knelt before him."

"Weep no longer, Robert. As he rode from thee, I saw him turn back to smile at thee. It was as if he had found a special thing in thee that none of the rest of us possessed. He looked like a man who had found what he wanted."

"What meanest thou, Father? What could I have that so great a man could want?"

"There is a gift given to a few men in the world. It is more than a brave heart. It is a brave and tender soul. And a brave soul not only bears the pain of death—it bears the pain of life."

"But how could such a man as Thomas à Becket know where to seek one with such a gift?"

"There is a second sight given unto some, my boy. It enables them to see in the flash of an eye, in the sudden twist of circumstance, in living dreams, what the future holds. The archbishop may have seen in thee another

savior for the Saxons. But thou needst not worry. Life is long and thou art still but a child."

The intense excitement in the boy's heart died. Ahead of them the high stone wall of a neighboring castle proclaimed the Norman's stronghold. The bitterness of impatience came over him. He was only a child and he could not openly rebel against the world of Normans he lived in. He was forced to live with his father in the low cottage lying in the shadow of the castle wall. He was forced to wait. And what brave hero has ever waited for adventure?

Sobs shook his tired body. He felt his father's strong arms lift him and carry him into the warm room. His heavy eyes shut out the homely, everyday surroundings and in his dreams the tired boy became a man.

A YOUNG OUTLAW IS BORN

Robert awoke to very early morning. The first pale streaks of sunlight came in his window, inviting him to come out. He heard the twittering, singing, birds as they flashed in and out of the trees by the cottage wall. Perhaps he had an hour or more before it would be time for him to go with his father to the gate that led through the wall of the castle into the stately Norman garden where he must work all day. Struggling into his green doublet, he was over the window sill in a trice, smelling the moist earth, the full-blown flowers, the fresh air. He felt the cool grass brush against his bare feet. jumped to the sun-warmed stones of the walk, then back to the dewy grass again. It was a day for running. Without a glance backward, he ran down the road toward the place where a path broke through the woods. It was his discovery, this opening in the thicket with the great oak tree at the far end, a perfect target for the arrows that sped from his taut bow.

One had to be very careful with bows and arrows. The Normans had made stern laws. They called it protecting the king's deer, but even those who shot for fun, as Robert did, were in some danger, for the wardens were sly fellows who pounced on you from the shadowy bushes and chose to believe what they would as to where the arrows were aimed. But here was safety. When a twig snapped, the boy knew it was only a brown squirrel in search of his morning breakfast. And one could shout

without being afraid of answering echoes. Who could hurt a boy when he couldn't be found?

But today the lad tired of shooting the arrows into the gnarled bark of the oak tree. The flaming spark of rebellion that had burned his heart vesterday had left its mark. Why should a son of England use his weapon for play when there was war abroad in the land? True, it was not the war of one hundred years ago when the Frenchmen first came to England and were met in such glorious battles as that of Hastings. Today the Saxons could not rise to battle, for their greater number were reduced to poverty and were earning their living by working for the French nobles who had made England their home. But the great army of Saxons kept the hate of a cruel defeat smoldering in their hearts, and the war they waged this day was a war of the spirit, evident in the bitter glances directed at the arrogant knights who passed them on the road and the high shouts of gladness that greeted a Saxon such as Thomas à Becket.

The Saxon boy hated to go about his everyday tasks in a Norman garden. It seemed to him he was a traitor. A century ago the land had belonged to his great grandfathers, and here he was helping a Norman invader establish a foreign estate. Why wasn't he like the brave outlaw Hereward, who, when he heard that his inheritance had been seized by a Norman, gathered together his friends and fought the foreigner who had insulted his blood until the French noble ran for his very life away from the house he had taken?

The youth had forgotten he was only young Robert Hode. He sat on a great flat stone. His chin cupped in his hands, his breath coming swift and hard, he lived

again the story of the first Saxon outlaw. In the forest around him his wide eyes saw another forest where Hereward gathered one hundred men about him and built himself a wooden fortress on the island of Elv to wage war against the Normans. His young heart throbbed with the excitement Hereward must have felt as he broke forth from sheltering woods and marshes to attack the men appointed by the king to capture him. He could hear the outlaw's laughter as his strategy caught the Normans in such traps they could but say the evil one had aided their Saxon enemy. Verily that was a day when the king sent a witch to use her enchantment to stop the elusive Hereward. How confidently the strong Norman army had set forth with the sorceress at its head, held aloft in a wooden tower. Quickly Hereward must think what to do as he sees them coming. Ho, in a trice the forest of osiers which covers the marsh is burning and, instead of the brave Anglo-Saxon banditti, it is flames that rush forward to meet the Normans.

The boy on the rock another world away saw the whole picture, the sorceress perishing in the fire, the Normans scattering in all directions, floundering in the waters of the marshes, climbing the tall trees, racing away from the man they had come to capture, beaten back by the flaming protection he had made for himself. And standing, unafraid and proud, the figure of Hereward himself. The boy saw the hero as the story-tellers described him—a short man, typically Saxon in the build of his broad shoulders, immense breadth of chest, and strength of limb. His hands and feet were delicately molded and the long locks of golden hair set him apart from the rough soldiers of the time, marking him of most noble

and even, as he really was, of ancient royal blood. The strange pair of eyes, one gray and the other blue, gave him a sinister expression it was said, but save that the lower jaw was too long and heavy, men had found his face alight with an extraordinary beauty.

Oh, to be like Hereward! To live all day in the great forests of England where no town sheriff dared to come with his unjust laws! To shoot the king's deer for food, to frighten the king's men for gold! To be an unknown hero that the English people loved and the Norman people feared, with one hundred companions to do one's bidding!

While the sun rose higher and higher, the boy sat with his chin still cupped in his hands. His young mind was busy with a plan. He too would be an outlaw. A year or two must pass before he could start forth to fight for England. There must be no trace of childishness left when he set out to gather his band. Who would follow a leader who had not grown tall? And the markings his father made on the tree in their garden showed he must add another head's length before he reached his father's shoulder. And who would trust the judgment of one who knew not the strategy of a Hereward? Robert knew he had much to learn. But when he had waited a little, he could go. Leave his father who had stirred his young heart with the story of men who had died for England and the Saxons, leave the warm little cottage that he had grown up in, to live in a forest home under an open sky. He wondered what they would do on cold winter nights. Did outlaws ever leave the forest? Perhaps there were caves, or they might build a wooden fortress as Hereward had done. He brushed the picture of a bleak, snowcovered forest away from him and thought of a roaring fire with figures grouped about it, the savory smell of roast meat, and the songs of merry men.

His blue eyes were earnest, and in his serious young heart he resolved to follow the plea of the good archbishop who had touched his hand and said to him: "England needs saviors and it is among the Saxons that they must be found." It was a noble thing to be an outlaw this day, to avenge his people who had been struck down by armed Normans who considered themselves gods among common men, to make the foreigners understand the despair of the Saxons by killing those who had wrought that despair, for prayers and entreaties had never reached the ears of the Normans. He would mock them and torment them and play pranks even as Hereward did. No foreigner would put fear in his loyal heart. He would find other lads to join him. They would live outside the laws made by descendants of invaders. Together they would form a Saxon brotherhood, under such a military organization as Hereward had begun.

The gladness in his heart died. It was long past the hour for his work. His father was stern and not afraid to punish his son with a stick. But as he turned to go Robert shot once more at the great oak, a smile on his lips, a light in his eyes. It seemed to him that he shot his arrow straight through the heart of a proud Norman who lived in the castle near by.

Swiftly as a young deer he slipped through the thicket, found the path that no other eye could see, ran the length of dusty road with never a glance backward into the forest of his dreams.

In front of the cottage his father paced up and down.

"Boy, boy, where hast thou been?"

There was no anger in his father's voice, and the light in his blue eyes was of kindness and tenderness.

"Only up yonder, Father, in the forest. Is it very late, Sire? I had forgotten I was Robert Hode, Father, and needs must work this day."

"Forgotten thou wast thyself? Then who wert thou?"

The boy hung his head and, kicking the dust of the road with his brown toe, kept silent in his shame.

"Is it that I have but a dreamer for a son, then, when there is work to be done in the world? Thou wouldst hurt thy father, little Robin?"

Robin—it was the name his mother had for him when he was small and not yet growing up to be a man. A new strength broke through his shyness.

"But it was a great dream, Father. Marry, thy Robin hath become a man."

"What meanest thou, Son?"

"Thou hast always said, Father, that a boy becomes a man when the future lies unrolled clearly before him, when he feels strength in his limbs and joy in his heart for the work he hath laid out for himself."

"And what is it that thou wilt become? What canst thou choose at this early hour before thou hast served an apprenticeship, before thou hast learned any trade?"

"I can become an outlaw, Father, a savior of the Saxons."

"My son, the good man's words of yesterday have turned thy head. Come to thy work and forget thy vain dreams." Again the boy hung his head. His young mouth quivered, but resolutely set again. A new sternness came into his eyes. His expression was curiously like that of his father. Silently father and son sat down to the plain noonday meal. Silently they worked the long afternoon through. It was not until they walked together as they had walked the night before, homeward through the dusk, that they drew near to each other once more.

"Father," the boy said, hesitantly, eager, "where dost thou think Hereward would set up his camp if he came again to England?"

The man did not answer at once. The boy watched him shyly from under his long lashes. He saw the familiar little frown come between his father's deep eyes, the frown that meant he was puzzling over something. He saw the serious eyes lighten as if the answer had been found. And to the child's listening heart came his father's musing answer, the answer that meant his father understood that the boy spoke not for Hereward, should the Saxon outlaw return, but for another outlaw born that very day.

"Methinks, Son, 'twould be in the forest of Sherwood, the greatest forest in all England, that stretches for several hundred miles from that town which is called Nottingham to the center of Yorkshire. There are woods so deep we needs must think of our thickets as only so many bushes scattered along the highway. There might a man attack and hide all at once in the safe covering of deep shadowy groves. There might live one hundred men, unheard, unseen, in the vast stretches of greensward. And if the leader of such a band had a

ready wit about him, he would not leave it to nature alone to keep him in safe hiding. Even as God hath used art to keep his feathered things safe by coloring their wings the brown of the tree trunks, so a keen woodsman could protect his men. He would clothe them all alike so they would move forward in a mass and none would know how many of them lurked together, and he would have the color of their garments blend with the forest. I have heard it said that those highlanders of Scotland who dwell upon the heath wear a sort of brownish plaid. Such a color would not hide a man in our English woods, however. Green, methinks, the color needs must be, but even that alone is not enough to decide the matter entirely. There is an exact shade to be considered, for it is in the slight detail, little lad, that a man showeth his greatness. The color of thine own doublet is what the archers are accustomed to wear to hide them from the deer—a Kendal green, the merchants call it.

"Ah yes, Father, that is the color. A Kendal green we needs must have."

"How now, not so fast, little lad! Often I have thought it had too much yellow mixed with it to sink into the shadows. Now there is Saxon green which is the true green of the grass."

"But certainly, Father, now that thou speakest of it, the green of the grass would be far better to hide the woodsmen."

"Robin, thy mind leapeth too fast to consider the matter rightly. For that green also seemeth to me to have too much of brightness about it. In truth, if I remember rightly, there is but one cloth in England —

a texture of excellent quality—that taketh a deep leaf green when it is dyed. It is called Lincoln cloth, Son, and even as Coventry cloth dyeth the best blue, Lincoln green is the best green to be found in the kingdom. I can see well in my mind's eye a hundred fellows all in Lincoln green from hood to hose, with nothing but the light triangles of their faces to tell them from the bushes of the forest. Yes, yes, Robin, it is to Sherwood an outlaw would go to form his band. It is from the deep and wild forest land that our conquest of the Normans must come."

And in the thickets by the roadside the young boy saw the trees of Sherwood Forest, rising darkly and so thick together that their foliage hid the great stone wall of the Norman castle, and he lived for a moment in the England of the Saxons.

* * *

And while the boy slept in the night, the father lay awake and fearful. What had he done by telling his son to go to Sherwood Forest? He had yielded to the lad's fantastic idea of trying to be a Hereward. He had given his consent just as surely as if he had said, "Yes, my son, thou shalt be an outlaw." And years of loneliness faced him, years of anxiety, for his son would be outside the protection of the law, constantly tracked like a wild beast, a flame of Saxon rebellion that the Normans needs must quench for their own safety. And how could this frail Robin of his withstand whole armies, the sheriffs, the knights, the proud clergy? "Mother of God," he prayed, "what must I believe of my little son?" And through his dark thoughts came the radiance of truth. And the

father knew that his boy had been given more than a brave heart—a brave and tender soul. He saw in a sudden flash a future day of victory for young Robin Hood. Winging this thought to the Virgin, a tender smile played around his lips, and with peace in his heart the Saxon father slept.

APPRENTICESHIP TO MANHOOD

Even as Robin Hood failed to notice the days change into the dark mysteries of nights, so the golden summers became burnished autumns and the years passed without any counting on his part beyond the occasional marking of his height on the great oak tree outside the cottage door. Living within the shadow of the great cathedral at Canterbury had left its mark upon the boy's sensitive heart. The chimes that filled the sunset hour with sweetness often roused in him a strange sense of interruption. He was surprised to find his strong body trembling with emotion. He found that his eves which looked unmoved upon misery and bloodshed would well with tears as he watched the great processions pass through the cathedral doors. The thin tall crucifixes, the flames of the white candles, the red cassocks and white surplices, the sweetness of the incense—all these bore down upon him until the outside world was forgotten. Yet in the minds of the townspeople he was not religious, for it was said he had not entered the cathedral since the day of Thomas à Becket's murder. True, he had been seen to wander into the "Lady's Chapel," which was built a little apart from the great cathedral. Here behind a high altar sat the Virgin, superb and mysterious in a blaze of light. But others who went to worship there said that Robin did not kneel before her. He stood aloof and a little awkward, searching the delicate figure with questioning blue eves.

In his heart a painful struggle was taking place. He was barred from a religious life by something as strong as iron doors. The point upon which his whole life turned was one that the Christian religion denied him. For there was murder in Robin Hood's heart. His burning hatred of the Normans had increased with the years. He still saw himself as a boy in the forest shooting his arrow into the center of the broad trunk of the oak, and the oak was not a tree at all but the pierced body of a proud Norman lord.

Nothing had been able to take the bitterness from him. With scorn he had viewed the attempts of King Henry to heal the wound of the people brought about by

the archbishop's death.

In 1170, the very year of Thomas à Becket's murder, the King had sought forgiveness by founding in the center of Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire the beautiful Newstead Abbey. The next act of contrition, which had succeeded in convincing hundreds of Saxons that the King had been forgiven by Thomas à Becket, had taken place not long before. Along the same road to Canterbury that the archbishop had ridden, a strange pageant had come. King Henry, dismounted from his horse, his silken robes laid aside, his royal feet bare of shoes, had walked three miles in the stony and muddy road to the tomb of Thomas à Becket. Before the startled eves of the rough townspeople His Majesty had prostrated himself, weeping and crying penitence. And the same men who had heard the last words of the archbishop listened now to the bishop of London, one Gilbert Foliot who had been the greatest enemy of Thomas à Becket, read a proclamation which said that Henry, their king. protested that he had neither ordered nor wished the death of the martyr. And having shouted this lie into the ears of the simple peasants, the King bowed his head and, stripping off his clothes, let the bishops and monks strike him lightly across his bare shoulders, saying in a loud voice, "As thy Redeemer was scourged from the sins of men, so be thou scourged for thine own sin."

And as one after another the monks struck the great grandson of William the Conqueror, the foolish hearts of the peasants believed all they saw. Not so Robin Hood. The whole scene sickened him. He knew that the king's act was only an attempt to buy the Saxon loyalty. So while other Saxon men were forgetting a little the rebellion that they had nursed for a century, Robin Hood was not. But no longer did a youthful ardor and idealism flow through his veins. He saw that his task was far more difficult than he had supposed. He wanted to make war, to slay the Normans who had oppressed his people. But first he would have to reawaken the sleeping hate of the Saxons.

And then on a still, moonlight night, a sorrow came to Robin Hood that shook him rudely from his world of dreams. The soul of his father passed from the stalwart body. Robin Hood's only living possession had left him without even a goodby. The dreadfulness of death was its power to come suddenly, to seize a man while he slept, before he or those about him were ready for its shock. And now the young man saw that his dreams of slaying were over. Who was he to bring death willingly?

Thus, with a dream of a dozen years brought to a rude close, with no human touch to break the days of lone-

liness, Robin Hood turned groping hands to new worlds. King Henry, whom he still hated, was the means of escape from Canterbury. His Majesty's amazing success in quieting rebellion in England by the visit to Thomas à Becket's tomb made it possible for him to go with his armies to his other kingdom in France. Normandy was a constant danger. The French tried to wrest it from the English king at every opportunity. And to make matters worse, King Henry's sons, Richard and Geoffrey and young Henry, were continually plotting against their father and aiding the French king. And so it was to Normandy that Robin Hood went. It was not at all unusual for young Saxons in search of excitement to join King Henry, and many a band of rough-clad peasants followed the trumpet and drum and shining mail in the King's army across the sea to France. As no one was aware of Robin Hood's particular hatred of the Normans and all that was Norman, no one was surprised when he set out upon this same voyage.

Once he was in Normandy, it was not difficult to escape from King Henry's men. And since, soon after his arrival there, a truce was declared between the King and his wayward sons, Robin Hood found himself unmolested and eager for adventure in a new world.

And now into Robin Hood's spirit came again the strange spell of great cathedrals. Almost against his will, he was shaken and stirred at the sight of the abbey church at Mont Saint Michel. Proudly and fiercely it stood, high on the summit of granite rock overlooking the restless ocean stretching northward to England. Here it was in 1066 that William the Conqueror had raised an army of 40,000 men who were to invade England.

Robin's father had often told him who Saint Michael was. He was nearest to God because he alone was the conqueror of Satan.

But Robin Hood found no rest here. The saint of the abbey was a warlike figure, and Robin Hood was afraid to think of war. The hostile stone front that the mount turned to England seemed to him like the onslaught of great Norman forces. He could think of naught but the fact that Normandy and England were linked, and that thought was bitter to him. Then, too, he found that he missed the Virgin. No one worshiped her in this rock-bound church. The place was too grim to hold her delicate beauty. Danger lurked about the unprotected coast. The people preferred to put their safety into the hands of a more powerful force than the Virgin. They said their prayers and knelt in worship to the terrible figure of the archangel Michael who stood on the summit of the tower, his wings outspread to protect them, his sword uplifted to warn their enemies away.

So it was perhaps this loneliness for something of Canterbury that turned him toward Chartres, the home of the blessed Virgin. And here, just as he had found men at Mont Saint Michel with no thought for other than the warlike archangel, he found men with uncovered heads before the Queen of Heaven. He found that they sang songs calling her Empress, Mistress, and Mother of Divinity. He read the inspiration she gave in the devout and earnest faces of the people who gathered near her church. After the gloom and dusk of other cathedrals he had been in, he found happiness in the great windows that filled the chancel with sunlight. He saw for

the first time that religion did not have to be gloomy. The cathedral at Chartres was like a beautiful palace built to please the Virgin. And besides the royal blues and scarlets and golds that gave the walls and windows startling beauty, there was sculpturing of a lighter motif. There was even humor allowed in such strange combinations as an ass playing a lyre and in fabulous animals striking marvelously strange poses. Robin Hood found that amusement was not only allowed but taught by the Virgin. And he who had had such a serious childhood began to try the dormant powers of laughter.

It was one evening in late summer. The liquid sounds of birds murmured a low accompaniment to the chimes from the church of the Virgin. Against the yellow streak of sky uncovered as yet by night, the dark towers of the cathedral lifted their delicate spires. Robin Hood, who had grown used to his life in a strange land, walked the streets of Chartres with the leisurely air of one who knows his whereabouts by heart. He had found peace at the altar of Mary, and his life had narrowed down to a clock-like movement of work and prayer.

Inside the church he faced for a moment the great rose window opposite the Virgin. The rose was her emblem. He gazed at the luminous glass insets, like clusters of jewels, flaming and brilliant. The wine-colored medallions offset by delicate sapphire lights stirred him to life. The green light was the green of forest leaves shining in the sun. The blue was the blue of English skies. He was suddenly, and for the first time since he had left England's shores nearly a year before, filled with homesickness. Once realized, it was all he could do to keep from running from the foreign church,

breaking at once the bonds that kept him in Normandy, and setting sail for England. And with the thought of England came again the old desire to show her his love, to gather Saxons about him, to show the Normans there were those left who had not forgotten that the Normans had been invaders, who would not live in towns ruled by their descendants. With the door of freedom open and the glorious sunlight of England calling him, the young man still hesitated. It was the thought of the Virgin that stilled his beating heart. She it was who had given him peace when he was in sorrow. Was he to leave her now without a sign that he would never forget her?

He lifted his eyes to the figure of the Queen of Heaven. Commanding and dignified she faced him. The aureole above her head was a shimmer of golden sunlight. A sad, haunting face looked down on him. But the mouth seemed to smile at him tenderly. There was even the little lifting of the corner that had first told him she wanted him to be merry. Her lips were parted eagerly, and he saw that it was life she wished for him. And there could be no life for a Saxon in Normandy. He was viewed here as nobody. It was in England that he belonged.

He knelt before her, and as he bowed his head he looked once more at the face he had vowed never to forget. And he whispered his pledge to her—that he would make life a joyous thing; that he would not think of death and its sadness again; that he would help the poor oppressed Saxons and would make merry upon the Normans without doing them bodily harm or any lasting injury.

Rising, he hurried from the magic of her presence. Looking back at her for the last time, his mind caught the loveliness of her face and engraved it on his heart, and as long as he lived no other image was to take its place.

"AS CROOKED AS ROBIN HOOD'S BOW"

Many years had passed since the death of Thomas à Becket in the cathedral at Canterbury. King Henry had ruled for nearly thirty-five years and had come to old age. The people of England were looking to his death and to the next king in line, Richard, the son who had quarreled with his father and brothers most of his life. But it was Richard the Saxons loved, for his bravery commanded their respect and he had thrown off some of the proud Norman ways that his forefathers had brought to England. And though he may have hardened his heart toward his own father, it was that very will that made him deserve the title of Lion-Heart.

So it was that a year or two before Richard became king many strange things began to happen in that part of England lying around the town of Nottingham on the outskirts of Sherwood Forest. Nottingham differed in a few respects from the other towns dotting the landscape near it. The county of Nottinghamshire was mainly a country of gentle contours, little suited for those great hill fortresses to be found on the crests of the hills in many other counties. Thus to Nottingham was given the only great fortress in that part of England. Perfect conditions for a promontory fortress existed in this small town. The castle of Nottingham was built on a great sandy rock which toward the south formed a steep, high promontory. This steepness was intensified on all sides by an artificial intrenchment which divided the

promontory from the mainland. A moat sweeping northward connected the old castle and the town of Nottingham. King Henry had granted this castle to his favorite son, Earl John of Mortain, in 1174, and ever since that time the little town had enjoyed the attention of royalty.

The Leen River flowed close by on its way to the sparkling Trent a mile to the south of the village. To the north was the wilderness of Sherwood Forest. Into this grove of natural beauty had come the whispering, bustling echo of the king's court, the nation's trade, the lingering tyranny of the invasion. Around the five-acre market place stood lofty buildings, the quaint and modest Church of St. Mary, the thatch-roofed cottages lining the main road, and the proud manors rearing themselves massively.

In one of the large manors of Nottingham lived Sir Guy of Gisborne, an arrogant noble who rejoiced in tyranny. He trampled the spirit of the townspeople, seized their lands and goods, and ruled their sheriff and officials in such a manner that his word was law. His ambitions were centered about the king's court, where he hoped to be a power, and he furthered his friendship with Earl John by treachery and guile. In the days of John's absence from the village, Sir Guy was a frequent visitor at Nottingham Castle, and it was said he knew its secrets better than did the royal family itself. Something of his cruel spirit had been inherited by his little son, Geoffrey, who, though but fourteen years of age or so, strutted about in velvet doublets and forced the townspeople to call him "Sire." Close by lived a noble of very different character. Lord Hugh Fitzwalter was a deeply pious man, a dreamer who knew not the treachery that the world of Normans moved in. His heart was so bound up in holy works that he lived not in the world of everyday Nottingham at all. His head in the clouds, he saw not the tricks of his outwardly friendly neighbor, Sir Guy of Gisborne, who was rapidly impoverishing him. While the good Lord Hugh walked in his gardens with head bowed thanking God for the beauty about him, his little daughter Marian ran undisciplined the lengths of the estate. She climbed the trees, talked to the birds, and grew into a dryad-like creature of unworldly ways and untamed beauty.

It was to this complacent little town of Nottingham, with nothing more exciting than its nobles and their children, that a rumor came of such amazing import that it was soon to go the rounds of all England. The tale arose among the common people first. It was told at nights around the fires in thatch-roofed cottages and was whispered among the crowds that went to the market place at high noon. It concerned mysterious strangers seen on the outskirts of Sherwood Forest, all clad in Lincoln green—doublet, hose, and hood—all armed too heavily for innocent purposes, with sword and dagger and bow. Bright arrows feathered from the peacock showed beneath their belts, and each had a horn suspended on a green strap across his broad shoulders. And this was the thrilling story—that an outlaw band had sprung up in their midst. Whence they came no one dared to say. Perhaps, some murmured, it was by magic they had first appeared, but it was not magic that was increasing their band. It was the wonderful strength and power of one Robin Hood who was the chief outlaw.

Wherever a man of Saxon blood and unusual prowess in physical strength was, Robin Hood was sure to appear, for it was such men he sought to add to his numbers.

The tale reached the ears of two nobles in Nottingham on a night when men had come from far and wide to a banquet given by Sir Guy of Gisborne in honor of his son's fifteenth birthday. After the feast was over, little Geoffrey and his playmate, Marian Fitzwalter, slipped away to play hiding games in the great manor. Around the long table the scarlet and gold of rich robes told of Norman riches, and a glance at the pale faces and dark hair of Sir Guy's guests proclaimed them Frenchmen with no drop of Saxon blood in their veins. Breaking in on the serious words of those who talked of the last hours of King Henry, a gay young nobleman spoke of the fame of the new outlaw that the townspeople of Nottingham called Robin Hood.

The proud Sir Guy answered him haughtily, "Tales of Robin Hood are good enough for fools."

The other nobles remained quiet. Perhaps the persistent rumors of the outlaw's war upon the royalty of the land had made them superstitious about mocking him. Their minds told them such a thing as one single-handed Saxon against a world where Normans ruled was an unheard-of thing, but their hearts throbbed faster at the thought of a brave enemy lurking unrecognized in their midst. The young man answered Sir Guy mockingly:

"Perhaps the day may come, Sir Guy, when thou wilt have to hand over thy rich robe, the gold in thy pocket, the shoes from thy feet, and say to him who held thee to it, 'Good even, good Robin Hood,' for I have

heard it said that none dare to be aught but civil in their fear of this brave fellow."

"Many men talk of Robin Hood that ne'er shot in his bow," replied Sir Guy scornfully. "Thou wouldst do well, Sir Roger, to talk of what thou knowest and not of what thou dost pick up among the commoners on the streets about thee."

Even as he spoke, the sound of running feet and the childish voice of Geoffrey screaming in terror aroused them. Into the room the boy ran, gasping for breath, sobbing incoherent phrases, "Twas the fellow the townsfolk have spoken of, he whom they called Robin Hood! I saw his green doublet!"

"Marian, my baby! Where hast thou left her, thou cowardly youth?" Lord Hugh cried fiercely.

A soft laugh came to the anxious father's ears. The musical voice of his little Maid Marian sounded at the door, "What did the baby Geoffrey fear on his fifteenth birthday? The good Robin Hood hath a right good shoulder to ride, Father."

The frightened nobles gasped in terror. Filling the doorway with his massive frame stood a fellow clad all in Lincoln green, his hood drawn well down over his face, hiding all save his smiling mouth. On his shoulder, one arm encircling him, rode Maid Marian. From the white triangle of her face her great dark eyes gleamed. They looked serious and startled. As she saw the frightened look on her father's face, the laughter died from her winged mouth whose red lips curved so that they looked like the flying birds outlined delicately against distant skies. With a swift, graceful movement, she bent her head to look beneath the hood of the man who carried her.

But even as her bright eyes surprised his hidden ones, he turned quickly from her. As the men at the table stirred as if to attack the impudent outlaw, he too stirred to action. Putting the little girl gently from him, he drew forth his bow. The hood had slipped away from his face and the nobles caught a glimpse of stern blue eyes like bits of steel, of a face no longer young, showing the lines of hardship and suffering. Pulling his bow to its farthest stretching point he held it aloft. And the watchers saw a whimsical smile light his face, heard a merry voice say, "Look ye well, brave Normans. Robin Hood has come into your midst and just you try and catch him; this wicked outlaw's paths will be as crooked as Robin Hood's bow."

And then he was gone even as he had come, quickly, silently, with laughter in his voice. And no arrow had been shot from the crooked bow that day, but fear had entered the heart of every Norman, save perhaps the good Lord Hugh whose hands caressed the tumbled curls of his little daughter, and the elfish Maid Marian herself whose wistful eyes were fastened on the spot where the man in green had stood, whose soft childish voice murmured the odd question, "Why, Father, was that wonderful Robin Hood young or old?"

Book the second



FORMING OF THE BAND

ROBIN HOOD SEEKS LITTLE JOHN

Now, though Robin Hood had met with great success in the creation of his outlaw band in Sherwood Forest and in the transformation of himself into a myth-like hero that half of England talked of, his task was not yet done. More gallant men there must be gathered about him, men whose hearts beat with his for the Saxons and whose minds found more in the forest brotherhood than a mere answer to the call of adventure.

This night as Robin Hood sat apart from the other outlaws under the cold sky, a great loneliness came over him. The hundred stars merged together as if they were seen through tears. The wind in the trees came and went with a rushing sound, like the sudden onslaught of fairy horsemen. The forest was dark with mystery and solitude. The chief of the outlaws knew he had but to go one hundred yards beyond this silent grove where the great camp fire roared to find gayety and companionship. But it would be the companionship of little men, men who contented themselves in obeying his orders, answering his bugle call, living with little thought or imagination for the morrow. There was no special one among them to whom Robin Hood could turn, no dauntless Launcelot in whom to put his trust, no Jonathan in whom an answering spark proclaimed a kindred soul. The dull ache of loneliness was no new thing. He had had it through

all the long years since his father had left him - years of weary travel from town to town toward his goal in Sherwood Forest. The outlaws that had joined him were not all alive with high hopes—they knew not his burning desire to avenge the sufferings of the Saxons. He was a mysterious stranger to most of them. It was rumored he had come to Nottingham to be near Newstead Abbey, built for his beloved Thomas à Becket. But certain of his companions had seen him grow white with anger when the abbey was mentioned, and though their forest home was but a short distance from the great monument, it was well known among them that their outlaw chief had never set eyes upon its fountain courtvard and its quadrangles of ivy-covered stone. They did not try to understand him, but rejoiced in being near him. Many had followed him because his hot words had caught the spirit of adventure in their hearts. Many came with him because the life in the English town had grown tasteless and stale and the vista of green trees and wild singing birds was very sweet.

Thus far the noblest member of his band was a gay young fellow, Will Stutely by name, who was possessed of a sharp and witty tongue. He was constantly bestowing merry titles on those about him. He turned a good man's name upside down, inside out, and the tenderest points of any gentleman's nature were naughtily played upon. But this very gayety sprang from an irresponsible, happy-go-lucky nature that made the boy as unsuited for serious business as the furry animals playing in the bushes. Will was forever tripping over his own two feet. He knew naught of woodcraft and the sound of his approach was like unto any elephant lumbering through

the forest. "Verily," the outlaws said, "the snapping of the twigs became as loud as barking dogs when Will Stutely passed that way." And he was forever getting lost and calling in his loud good-natured voice: "I say ye, where have ye gone—hey, hey, all of ye, ye have lost me!" And Robin Hood would have to send a yeoman in search of the foolish fellow that he might be led safely back to them, for none wished to lose him entirely.

But there must be men of vision near him, Robin Hood's heart cried—men to whom the plundering of baron, of bishop, and of knight was more than a pastime. There were the poor to keep, the downtrodden to save, and the dangerous work of detecting the plots of sly and ruthless Normans. For all these tasks clever trackers were needed, men with the bravery of heroes and the wit and humor that matches deceit with trickery.

So when Robin Hood left the cold, dark grove to go back to the lighted circle of merry comrades, he had a plan in his mind which he told them in part:

"Ye know, good fellows, our band must increase. Even as the power of the Normans hath grown greater as their line has grown longer, so must the power of Robin Hood's band try greater limits. I have heard tell of a giant of a man of Saxon heritage who liveth on the outskirts of Nottingham. He is reputed to be of amazing strength and bravery, and his name is John Little. Tomorrow being a Friday, he goeth into the town to the market place, and I shall so plan the matter that I shall encounter him on his return that I may have words with him."

"But Master," the outlaws cried, "thou must take with thee stout yeomen, for this John Little is said to be

a man of lofty spirit who may not receive thy words kindly."

"No, good comrades. I choose to meet this fellow all alone. There is but one of him, so it is but fair that one of us alone shall meet him."

Here the anxious voice of Will Stutely broke in, "But Master, suppose that the stranger be of greater size than thou art. Why, by the good St. Dunstan, 'twill do no good to try to add a fellow to the band when the doing so may subtract one."

"There will be no bloodshed, Will. Thou knowest I have vowed to the sweet Virgin to keep from fighting to the death whene'er it is possible. Should this giant of a fellow prove too much for me, I have but to blow my horn."

"Marry, thou art right, Master. One blast from thee and we shall know all is not quite well, three blasts and we will come running."

Laughing and excited at the thought of a new day of adventure, the outlaws left their master. For a long time Robin Hood watched the golden flames of the living fire, and little did he know that his wistful dream for understanding was soon to be fulfilled.

* * *

The heat of high noon scorched the roadside. A clouded sun made the sky a yellow glare. In and out of Nottingham drove the clumsy ox carts loaded down with farm products. An occasional weary figure plodded along, red-faced, hot, and uncomfortable in the burning heat. Men smelled the sultry air and hoped for rain, but the ominous yellow of a hidden sun persisted.

Robin Hood lay, cool and smiling, under a shady tree beside a wide rushing stream that cut through the road into Nottingham. Over the narrow bridge must come those who left the market place. Thus over the slender way must come John Little whom the outlaw awaited. Gone was the serious mood of the dreamer who had sat by the greenwood fire, and in its place was the laughing hero of a dozen stories circulating the countryside. This great fellow who leaned drowsily against the tree, and who seemed to be enjoying a joke if one were to judge by the curling smile on his lips and the lights in his blue eyes, was the very one who, not long ago, had bowled at ninepins on the sward of Fotheringay Abbey. And the pins, if you please, had not been fashioned out of myrtle wood but were living men, properly stationed so that with a good stroke of the great round stone all had been bowled to earth at once. Clerks of the abbey had served for targets, with their proud abbot for head piece, and they had been that day the nine most angry monks in Christendom. The words they spoke soon after the departure of Robin Hood and his merry men could never be found in Holy Writ. And should one of the monks be asked to describe their tormentor, his words would be of tantalizing laughter, of Lincoln green, of mischievous eves, for fleeting were the visits of this brave outlaw and none knew surely his looks when he met him again.

So, though many passed the fellow half asleep in the shade, none saw aught but a lusty yeoman resting from the noonday sun. None knew the phantom Robin Hood.

Then, at last, the outlaw stirred to sudden and swift action, for far down the road came a towering figure. Seven feet seemed not too great an estimate of this

fellow's height, and Robin Hood went forth to meet him with a tingle in his blood, for here seemed to be a man worthy of encounter. Straightway the two came to the center of the narrow bridge. They met each other squarely, and neither could pass without the other retreating to the bank whence he had just come. Robin made as if to go his way regardless of the great fellow blocking his path.

"Well, thou rock of ages," he said impertinently, "go back yonder and grow upon the grass or I shall be forced to push thee into the stream that runneth under

the bridge."

"And who may this shadow be that darkens my pathway?" John Little retorted scornfully.

"The shadow of thy death, shouldst thou not move right merrily back to you bank," said Robin Hood.

The stranger, instead of showing a sign of fear, laughed loudly and gave Robin Hood a playful poke in the ribs.

"Thou hast laughed enough, awkward fellow. It is time that I show thee good Nottingham play. Forsooth, there is always an arrow to bear home my point when my words carry it not."

His face flushed with anger; his slender hands searching his quiver for a broad arrow, Robin Hood was suddenly a menacing figure. The stranger stiffened. His eyes flashing, his mouth stern, he said hotly, "If thou darest to touch the string of thy bow, I'll lift thee up in my strong arms, carry thee to the bank, and give thee such a hiding as a naughty child demands."

The proud spirit of Robin Hood reared itself fiercely, and as the anger in his heart increased, the words he uttered became more impulsive: "Whoever thou art, thou dost prate like an ass, for should I choose I could draw my bow in a flash, and before thy great arms could touch me this slender arrow could make swift entry to thy proud heart."

"If I prate like an ass," said the stranger coldly, "then thou pratest like a coward. And I would rather go to my grave shot than be the shooter in a contest where my opponent had naught but a staff to match my arrows."

"Thou art more than right, varlet. Never have I been called a coward and this day is no time for me to begin. I will take a staff from you thicket of trees and we will try thy manhood to see if it matches thy size."

"By heaven, it suiteth me," said the stranger with a half smile on his stern mouth. "We will bandy each other right merrily until one of us, and I am not afraid to guess who 'twill be, shall splash into the stream, vanquished."

Into the thicket went Robin Hood, and with skill he cut for himself a staff of ground oak. He tested its strength across his knee and played it in the air as if to grow used to the feel of its thickness. But, truly, he was using this moment to take a long look at the size of his enemy. And if there was a sinking of his heart as he saw the stranger's shoulders full five inches broader than his own and the stranger's body full half a head taller, no one was the wiser. At once the two were upon each other, and the slender bridge seemed to bend beneath the fearful weight of the blows that were dealt.

"And there is a blow! A blow fit for a king!" cried Robin Hood as his staff met the stranger's shoulder with a loud thud.

"A blow pays that blow," the stranger answered.
"I can give thee as good as thou bringest."

"Well, methinks I shall give up my trusty bow for good if I always meet with such success with my staff," Robin Hood smiled wickedly.

At that moment the stranger's staff hit Robin Hood across his head and the blood began to trickle into his eyes. Then all semblance of playing left the two. The outlaw laid upon the stranger such blows that he seemed to smoke. The passionate fury that filled him put a stop to his skill. And the stranger, who seemed to grow cooler as his opponent grew angrier, teased him as one teases an enraged bull.

"Truly, little one, thou must have threshed corn in thy youth," he tormented.

With the taunting voice of John Little in his ears, Robin Hood put all his strength into a thrust that, had it met its mark, might have ended the play in tragedy. But the tall stranger easily warded it off, and the force of the counter attack sent gallant Robin Hood tumbling into the stream. Laughing, the stranger called down to him, "And prithee, good fellow, where art thou now?"

The cold plunge had brought the good sense back to the outlaw and, laughing, he answered: "Faith, in the flood am I, and floating along with the tide. The coolness of the water is not at all bad to the touch of my hot self and though thou art indeed the victor of the battle, I am the victor in comfort."

"It was well fought, my friend, and thy strength well matcheth my own."

"I needs must acknowledge thou art a brave soul, and yea, thou hast won the day," sighed Robin Hood.

And he waded through the long weeds until he reached the bank. Here he pulled himself up by the overhanging boughs of the willow tree. Standing on solid ground once more, he tilted his head back and lifting his horn to his lips, straightway blew a loud blast.

"And why didst thou do that?" the stranger asked

with a puzzled frown on his face.

Robin Hood answered not. He stood listening to the echo resounding over the valley. A half smile on his lips, the light of triumph in his eyes, he blew again and again. And just when the stranger sensed something amiss and looked about him for an avenue of escape, a host of stout bowmen clothed all in green burst upon them. Good Will Stutely was the first to see his master, drenched to the skin.

"What is it, good Master? Thou art dripping wet."

"A good way to be on so hot a day, Will. It matters not. This fellow you see looming in the distance hath merely tumbled me in as a climax to a noble fight."

"Then, by my faith, he shall not go scot free. He shalt be ducked likewise," another outlaw cried.

"Forbear," cried Robin Hood, and the bowmen stood back. Seeing amazement in John Little's eyes, Robin Hood said to him: "There's no one shall wrong thee, friend, as long as I lift my hand for thee. These bowmen wait upon me, for I am Robin Hood. Threescore and nine brave followers have I in Sherwood Forest, but more I seek. If thou wilt wear my livery of Lincoln green, I'll teach thee the use of the bow. Thou shalt play all day, as we do, at the robbing of fat bishops, at the frightening of lean nobles, at the killing of fallow deer."

"I'faith, I have heard of thee and have often dreamed of seeking thee out," said the tall stranger. "I promise to serve thee with all my heart, and thou needst never doubt me, for I feel it was written in the stars that we should join hands."

The moment was serious. Robin Hood looked into the true eyes of his new-found comrade and was glad.

"Then welcome, John Little-"

But this dignity was too much for Will Stutely. His

gay voice interrupted the solemnity.

"His name shall be altered, and I will this fellow's godfather be. Away now to Sherwood, and prepare him a feast to strengthen him for the baptism he shall receive at our hands."

Then off on the run they went, and if eyes could have watched them the picture would have been of a green mass on the white road, dancing and leaping and running, for no outlaw had ever been known to walk like a proper man. And when they reached the forest home, a brace of fat does was fetched, and after the feast a christening took place the like of which was never seen before.

The bowmen formed a circle and into it came John Little, blindfolded so that he stumbled about and held forth his arms in a helpless childlike manner. After him strode Will Stutely, walking with affected grace, and his voice mocked the resonance of reverential intoning. Pouring a jug of humming ale on the stranger's head, the ceremony was begun.

"This infant was called John Little," he said, "but because of his delicate size, his dainty limbs, and his diminutive head, let us call him Little John."

Then the woods rang with merriment. And for a while Little John looked sullen, for his great body was his pride and to have it mocked at did not altogether please him. But when Robin Hood had called out, "Dress the pretty sweet babe in Lincoln green," he could but smile. And, besides, his heart was glad, for Robin Hood's band had taken him in. The outlaws told him of strange and wonderful things; how they never wanted for gold and silver so long as bishops carried a purse, how they who cared naught for royalty, lived as royalty in the forest on good cheer, with wine and honey and food for the gods at their command. And when the music and dancing and song ended, the glamor persisted. Little John saw that this was indeed a forest of dreams, for the vale of peace was beautiful even in somber darkness.

At last the whole train of brave fellows left the grove, and only Robin Hood and he who was to become his right-hand man remained. They said little, for that is the way of men, but the light of understanding was in their eyes. And as they clasped each other's hands for a good-night, a soft, gentle rain pattered down through the thick trees.

"It is England's heaven christening thee as one of England's men," said Robin Hood softly, and together they knelt down on England's soil.

THE SHERIFF SHOWS HIS HAND

At once Robin Hood found that Little John bore beneath the cover of ready wit a keen mind, eager to absorb all that the chief of outlaws wished to tell him. It was with hesitancy Robin voiced his dreams. He had tried to put them into words before and seen the hidden yawns of lively Will Stutely as a result. So, of late, he had carried them in his heart and his gay fellows knew naught of the serious plans of their master.

"I'faith, John, it is the proud Guy of Gisborne I should like to tease. He hath indeed a rare belief in his own self. In all Nottingham there is not a man who pokes his scrawny neck into other people's nook and cranny as doth Sir Guy. Hast thou ever heard him speak of me, John, on thy trips to Nottingham? Or does

he still ignore my existence, I wonder."

The eyes of Little John were serious. "Methinks that Sir Guy may prove more than child's play, Master. Ever since the night of thy unbidden entrance into his manor he hath borne thee a special grudge. Thou seest Robin, the story of that night spread far and wide. Little Maid Marian herself gleefully told her adventure to her nurse, Dame Softly, and she in turn told it to others who told it to still others, until it was the property of all the village. And with that tale the tide turned, somehow. When thou wast a phantom, lurking in the depths of Sherwood, gathering an army of men about thee for a purpose none could guess, a shadow of doubt and fear

hung over thy name. But thy graceful trick on the proud Sir Guy of Gisborne won the people's hearts, and thou knowest that what the people love, Sir Guy hateth. And his hate can be forcefully instilled into the weak veins of others."

"Come, Little John, thy words seem to hang heavy over my head. Thou art not truly serious in thy warning. Who are the others thou thinkest might wish harm on Robin's head?"

"First there is the sly sheriff of Nottingham who does naught but hop to the bidding of Sir Guy. And he is quite willing to hate thee—more than willing to obey the orders of a man who expresses what are his own inclinations."

"And why should the Sheriff of Nottingham be particular as to my fate?"

Then Little John took on the air of an elder lecturing his young son.

"Robin, they are all particular as to thy fate. The peasants who have learned to love thy wit, thy skill at saving a situation, have put thee in their prayers. Thou art more famous than Galahad, the pure in heart, of whom many a Breton minstrel sings, for peasants like best to build their dream upon reality. When thou didst assault the Normans' spirit by calling upon the lords at the banquet in Sir Guy's household, thou becamest a part of the great body of Saxons. And thy fate is their fate. Just so thy fate is the fate of the Normans in yon village. The more successful thy outlawry, the more shamed are those who make and uphold the law. The sheriff nurses a grievous wound in his heart for the simplest of thy pranks."

"Ha," Robin Hood shrugged his shoulders playfully, "this interesteth me strangely. And is there perhaps another who hath joined Sir Guy? Ah, let there be another so that we may have even more sport, Little John."

"The triangle is not fully represented yet," answered Little John. "Three classes thou hast sworn vengeance upon: The Norman bluebloods themselves (and Sir Guy flaunts their banner at thy forest home), those who carry out the Norman's will (that mulish sheriff is such a man),—and the third—"

"Ah, yes, the third." Robin Hood's eyes flashed. "The third group numbers those clergy who are no true messengers of the risen Christ—they who wear the cowl to cover their deceit, their greed, their fat souls."

"Thou art right. The third corner of the triangle is the man with a hard but pious heart. Methinks we need to watch one Bishop of Hereford rather closely. He is known to be fast friends with Sir Guy. It is he, in fact, who is carrying forth the sly plan to wrest from the good Lord Hugh Fitzwalter all the land he owneth under pretense it is for the church. Then when the day arrives for the payment of sundry debts which the dreamy Hugh hath incurred against Sir Guy, he will have naught to pay them with. The sly Gisborne, my Master, might well be termed a careful man."

"Well, the three of them are no match for the two of us, Little John."

"No, good Master, but the shadow of their bad will hovers about thee. While thou hast vowed merely discomfort on your enemies, I fear me they might not hesitate at death."

"Come, John, thou wouldst not have me retreat! I would match my wits against their clumsy weapons. And the thought of death cannot stop me. If it should come to me, Little John, what then? A quick sharp pain and the end of singing birds and green woods—that is all. Why should a man fear the only thing he may certainly expect?"

"Thy jest is sad, Robin. True, thy death would be no more than another dried and fading leaf drifting from the tree, and Sherwood Forest would look no different to the outward eye. But sad indeed would be the men in Lincoln green who look to thee to lead them through a

long life of joy and comradery."

"Let it sadden thee no more, Little John. The sweet Virgin watches over me in return for my vow to help all who suffer and to bind myself to none in the living world. My gift to her is my dream for the resurrection of the Saxons. And my life must find fulfillment in the happiness of seeing the Normans and Saxons merge on equal terms into one race that shall be called English. But no more of this that makes thee grave. There must be naught but merriment beneath the greenwood tree."

"Merriment it shall be, then, good Master. But let us keep a sharp eye on this Norman trinity that do not

welcome us to Nottingham."

"Aye, Little John, and let the naughty sheriff but show me his hand and I swear by the good Saint Dunstan he shall get it rightly slapped."

* * *

Sooner than Robin Hood dreamed, the cowardly sheriff of Nottingham showed himself the outlaw's sworn

enemy. He did not strike where the strongest of the band were. He set his trap for happy, careless Will Stutely who was forever getting lost from the others of the company because of his curiosity to find out what went on in the world beyond their Sherwood Forest home.

It was the day of the month that was given over to Nottingham fair. Robin Hood and his men often used the occasion to disguise themselves as cripples who on the day of the fair made a trip to the altar in the village church. Or they pretended to be knights seeking to purchase for a chosen lady a silken shawl from the merchants of Flanders who willingly paid their toll to enter the fair grounds with their wares. They wore the disguise of citizens, of peasants, or mummers and monks. They played their pranks and prayed to the Virgin and returned to Sherwood none the worse. It would have been folly to approach Nottingham attired in Lincoln green on the day of the fair, for every bailiff, every bishop's officer, and sheriff's guard was on the alert for one of Robin Hood's band.

But Will Stutely was born with neither caution nor cunning, and the day of the fair was as exciting to him as a Christmas Eve or an All Saint's Day. He loved the market of horses where prancers, draught horses, hacks, and the charging steeds used for racing were brought before the critical gaze of earl and baron and knight. His pulse leaped high at the thought of the evening games—running, leaping, wrestling, casting the stone, fighting with swords and arrows. There was sport to be had with a bat and ball for the very active—bowls and ninepins, the spinning of large tops; and for the idlers born with a gambler's blood, the breathless spell of dice-casting.

He never tired of the marvelous feats of skill performed for money. He would take his share of the captured riches of some knight and spend it all to watch the women who walked on high stilts and those who performed the more difficult tasks, such as balancing to the music of tabor and pipes, head downward and feet in the air, by the palms of the hands which rested on two sword points. Once—and he would never forget it—he had seen a woman walk on long stilts with a laughing baby in her arms and a water jug balanced upon her head. He had tried very hard to balance an ale jug on his own head without even attempting the stilts, and all the outlaws in the forest had rolled upon the greensward holding their aching sides and heipless with laughter.

On this particular fair day, Will Stutely rose early in the morning and set out by himself. To the other outlaws it was just another Nottingham fair. Perhaps when the heat of the day was over they would find costumes and walk into the town. But to Will it was much more than just a holiday. It was his special day that he waited for and counted upon, and he wanted to enjoy all of it. And so eager was he to get there that he forgot entirely the word that Robin Hood had passed among the outlaws. He wore his suit of Lincoln green into Nottingham.

No one saw Will Stutely as he slipped from the forest of Sherwood in the early morning. The leaves of the trees were heavy with dew, and the sun was still a red ball in the east. But when he reached the open road he found that others, like himself, were eager to reach the fair grounds early. Not until high noon would the knights and the sheriff make their appearance. Now the

highway was thick with peddlers, already loud in the crying of their wares. Through the wide gates poured man and animal alike. Oxen lowed, horses neighed, sheep bleated, and the sharp note of wrangling merchants eager for trade broke high above the laughter and chatter of greetings.

Will Stutely loved the fair grounds. He loved to see them in preparation, in the first busy, crowded moments of the day when the platform where sat the sheriff and his men was free from any such unpleasant gathering, and the great stage was empty except for the colored flags whipped into graceful action by the morning breeze -three-pointed pennons bearing poles, crosses, and roundels, symbolic of the Trinity and Crucifixion; the war-like flag of the Scandinavian Vikings gav with the bold figure of a raven: the triangular, four-pointed Saxon pennon brave among its Norman rivals—all richly embroidered with gold and precious stones; and high above the others the red flag with two leopards that William the Conqueror had introduced into England; and flying close beside it the flag of England that the present King Henry had created, a red field with three lions in the center.

At these monthly fairs few luxuries were displayed in the stalls that lined the square. Wine, salt, carbon, wheat, and wood were the mainstays of the sales, though all sorts of household utensils and a few stands of imported silks and spices always drew the crowds. Once in five years Nottingham gave a fair that brought merchants from foreign lands to it. Will remembered well the last. Never could he forget its richness. Huge bales of Oriental silks and brocades, boxes filled with sandalwood from

Tripoli, coral from Acre, alum from Aleppo, indigo from Bagdad, aloes from Arabia, azure (powdered lapis-lazuli), precious drugs and preserved fruits, vases of enamel and rare glass. Instead of the great quantities of brunette cloth which the peasants used for underwear, there were selections of the finest textures and brightest colorsscarlet, pale rose, purple, green, and grav. Besides there was metal, leather, and iron from the North, and pastry cooks from France had made marvelous little tarts that the people of Nottingham had tried ever since to copy. Strange tropical animals and dark-skinned foreigners had walked the streets of the little English village. Never did Will Stutely look at the horses and sheep, the dogs and cats, that he did not remember the wirv little monkeys that had graced that other fair but that he would have to wait full three more years to see again.

By high noon Will had spent nearly all his money and was ready to begin all over again. He had followed the maimed and the sick into the church and seen their ardent faces as they prayed to be healed. His heart had been stirred by the sorrowful face of a little girl of ten leading her blind father about by the hand, and he had slipped her a gold piece and mingled with the crowd before her glad eyes had found who had given it to her. He had listened to a minstrel sing the "Song of Roland," and had heard the story of "Sir Amadis of Gaules" and the "Love of Lady Dido for Lord Aenaeas," and the pretty romance of "King Ponthus and the Fair Sidonie." Then he had forgotten the pleasures of the mind for those of the body. His round eyes started from his head and his good natured face grew long with amazement as he watched the slender body of the tumbler stand first on his chest, then on his head, and then on his hands. And he had felt quite ill as he saw the fellow put his legs about his own neck and walk along as if he were a cripple that had none. Poor Will had grown a little stout on roast venison, and he fairly ached to think of himself in such a position. He had shown his skill at ninepins and good-naturedly slipped off without collecting his phenomenal winnings at dice. His heart had beat so fast he came near to suffocation as he saw three lovely maidens come riding into the square on white palfreys, their dainty slippers safely above the mud of the fair grounds. And the hot flush of anger had stained his round cheeks as he saw devout friars and monks casting a flirting eye at the ladies' gentle beauty.

Suddenly above the noise and confusion came the clarion call of a bugle. It meant the arrival of Earl John, who would inform the people of Nottingham of any new laws or the confirmation of old ones. Most of the spectators cheered loudly as the Earl mounted the platform. They whispered together, praising his cloak of white and gold and the ermine cap upon his head. They shrank back from his haughtiness, but admired loudly his audacious carriage. Scarcely anyone listened to the long document he read in a gentle, well-bred voice. Snatches that interested them stood out, but for the most part to those present it was only a marvelous picture. soundless and momentary. But Will Stutely listened with care, for as yet he had seen no one of Robin Hood's band in the gathering place, and an outlaw has a very particular need of knowing the laws if he is to break them. Will wished to report clearly to Robin Hood what the Earl said.

"John, Earl of Mortain, to all his men and friends, French and English, present and to come, greeting! Know ye that I have granted, and by this my present charter have confirmed, to my Burgesses of Nottingham all those free customs which they had in the time of King Henry my great grandfather, and in the time of King Henry my father, as the charter of the same Henry my father witnesses."

Here followed facts quite familiar to the outlaw's ears; that the men of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire ought to come to the borough of Nottingham on Friday and Saturday with their wains and pack horses-and certain matters referring to the sale of land and the establishment of a Merchant's Guild. At the end of the reading of the charter, the sheriff of Nottingham and his men climbed to the platform and Will sank hastily into the thick of the throng, wondering what added words were to come. At first the whole company knelt before Earl John and his equipage, gallant in their crimson velvets and sable furs. Then the sheriff came forward and, pointing to the sinister gallows that stood beyond him, he spoke, and his words were cold with ominous warning. His squat little body was like that of a gnome, and his shiny red face and beady eyes, his fat, bulging cheeks, his wet forehead, and stringy hair gave him an appearance of vast unpleasantness.

"Hear ye, all ye people of Nottingham and of the lands about us. Ye have heard of a rogue named Robin Hood that has come into our midst. A reward is now put upon his head should he be caught dead or alive, and if dead so much the better. He weareth Lincoln green for the most part, though his disguise is often a monk's robe

or a cripple's walk. Thou canst best tell him by his knavery and his thievery. Robin Hood and all his men must die."

Will Stutely was suddenly conscious of his Lincoln green doublet and hose. He was too wise in the ways of the hunter to turn and run away, thereby bringing swift notice upon himself. He mingled with the mob that now was moving toward the stage where the story of the Creation was to be presented. And soon he was so carried away by the wonderful play before him that he had forgotten entirely he had ever been one of Robin Hood's men. In the midst of the audience there was suddenly let loose a great variety of strange animals, turtles, and striped squirrels as well as kicking donkeys and barking dogs. This was to represent the creation of beasts. And later there was unloosed a flock of pigeons that flew above the heads of the multitude in a noisy, whirring confusion. And the simple hearts of the people were filled with wonder, for they lived again the day when God made the flying wonders of the air. It was in this breathless, silent moment that a rough hand descended upon Will Stutely's shoulder and a harsh voice broke the awed stillness of the audience, crying:

"Stand back! A traitor is here among the good people of Nottingham! He weareth Lincoln green, and his name and his face are familiar to the sheriff. He is one Will Stutely, close comrade of the rogue and outlaw Robin Hood."

Then Will was rushed to the platform where sat the sheriff, oily and smirking and triumphant in the capture of the wild forest bird. Pointing to the gallows, he cried in a mocking voice:

"Tomorrow he must be hanged, tomorrow at break of day."

And all the people stared at the round, good-natured face of Will Stutely, and some felt a pity in their hearts, but none dared to speak. And searching the faces of the crowd, Will saw none that he knew and despair came over him. He surged forward, filled with a mighty passion, and before they had caught him again two varlets that the sheriff had hired to spy upon him lay moaning in the dust. But twenty men were soon upon the outlaw and the people saw him led away, his head held high, his eyes flashing with courage. They were stirred at the sight of a man who went to his death uncowering and uncringing.

When the curfew bell rang out the people left the fair, happy and tired, few remembering the jolly fellow who was to be hanged at dawn. And high in the tower of Nottingham Castle the wistful eyes of Will Stutely peered through iron bars at his beloved fair grounds, lying dark and lonely under the starlight.

ROBIN HOOD TO THE RESCUE

"Will hath drunk too much ale at the fair, I fear me, and hath fallen asleep by the roadside," Little John murmured sleepily.

"How now?" Robin Hood stirred from his bed of leaves and in a trice was on his feet shaking the drowsy outlaw. "What sayest thou? Is our hapless Will not yet home? Come, how dost thou know he does not sleep in yon grove with the others?"

And now Little John was thoroughly awake also and he answered Robin Hood's questions alertly, trying to hide the anxiety that lay in his heart.

"I'faith, Robin, I told the foolish fellow to be home at dusk and to come to me as soon as he reached the forest safely. Needless to say, I was not surprised that he was not here when the sun dropped behind the trees, for his great love for the fair is well known to us. But now the moon hath climbed high in the dome of the heavens, and I blame myself sadly for sleeping so soundly. Had I but waited for him we might have learned his fate before the deep of night was upon us."

"Come, come, Little John, speak not of the brave fellow's fate as yet. There can be no fate unless Robin Hood have a hand in it."

Though the words of the outlaw chief were bold, his hand trembled a little as he lifted his horn to his lips to summon the men who slept. They gathered about him quickly and silently and answered his questions at once.

"Did any of ye go to Nottingham fair this yesterday?" asked Robin Hood.

And their answer one and all was, "Nay," for they had taken the day before to practice at shooting in case an hour of danger come to their master.

"Hath any of ye had a message from Will Stutely since he left in the early morning of yesterday for the fair?"

Solemnly they shook their heads.

"Well, there can be naught done until the light of day," said Little John sadly, "go back to thy rest, Robin Hood. I will stay awake to call thee when it is time to set forth."

"Nay, Little John, even as the light of day is too late for hanging according to the king's laws, so the light of day is too late for rescue should there be need of such."

The grave note in their chief's voice made the hearts of those who loved gay Will Stutely beat fast with fear.

"Dost thou think, Robin, that—that—" Little John's lips could not frame the words of his thought.

"Let not worry weigh upon thee until we know what hath really happened," said Robin Hood calmly. "I say only to ye that it would be folly to wait until the safe and comfortable day is upon us to hunt for one of us that may be in grave danger. I start forth at once from the forest. Let those who love our brotherhood come with me."

One and all they followed their master through the mysterious forest. The white moonlight turned the blackness into shapes. The trunks of trees that the night had blended together were outlined here and there with silver light. Only Robin Hood seemed his usual self.

It was he who led the way, singing in his deep full voice, now a hymn rising majestically, now a chattering, merry ballad with a "down-down-a-derry" repeated in its refrain. Little John strode beside him silently, his head hung, his fists clenched at his side. His moody thoughts were of reproach to himself that he had not seen earlier the failure of an outlaw to return to Sherwood, for that was the task Robin Hood had assigned to him in particular. And all the other outlaws felt the dread of the unknown upon them, and half-heartedly they joined in Robin Hood's songs.

But now they had reached the rim of Sherwood Forest, and their journey henceforth must be carried on with stealth and wariness. Into three groups they divided themselves, setting forth one after another at short intervals. The first to cross the wet meadows were Robin Hood and Little John, content to be alone together. The smell of hay and dewy flowers made the air sweet. The chirp of crickets and the ugly sound of bullfrogs gave a sense of reality to the silver countryside. Robin Hood had clothed himself all in scarlet and wore no hat upon his head that his men might see him from afar and know him from the rest of the band, dark, hooded figures in the moonlight. The blood red cloak, clasped tightly at his chin was black in the moonlight, making him look curiously pale. Beside the great figure of Little John he seemed slight and delicate. His face was alight with a spiritual splendor mingled with a magnificent light of courage.

After they had followed the white ribbon of road for an hour or more, they came in sight of the dark silhouette of Nottingham Castle. "Methinks we had best sit in the shadow of the trees until the next of our company come along," said Robin Hood. "If they have come thus far in safety, then all is well in our plans."

Very soon a blurred line of men crept near the spot

where Robin Hood and Little John lay in hiding.

"Stay ye here in ambush," said Robin Hood. "I shall find my way toward yonder castle and see if any guard lurking about the wall can give me news of our good Will."

A chorus of protest arose, for all feared that the dauntless courage of Robin Hood would lead him into danger too great for his ready wit to overcome. But a finger on his smiling lips silenced them, and they felt a fierce pride as they saw his graceful figure set off down the road.

Once near the wall of the castle, Robin Hood began his strategy. With his long golden hair curling about his scarlet jacket, he looked like a young noble. With careless ease he walked, a merry whistle announcing his approach to any who might lurk in the shadow of the castle.

The first to swing a lantern in his direction was the watcher at the gate, but, as Robin Hood passed him by without even a glance, the fellow did not bother him. The next light to swing his way came from the top of the wall, where several guards had gathered together to cheer each other through the lonely watch of the night.

"Ho, who goes there?" a harsh voice shrilled at the outlaw chief.

Robin Hood turned straight toward the company of guards standing upon the wall. Smiling merrily

at them, he stepped forward, a lurch in his walk and a drawling song on his lips:

A song sweet to hear
And pleasant to listen to
As a knight I shall make

"Your pardon, sire, go as ye please and forget that we asked thee thy business."

Robin Hood answered them not lest they listen for the Norman accent in his rough, good English voice. He covered his silence by an uncertain movement forward that nearly sent him to the ground, and the stifled laughter of the guards was music to his ears. He strolled onward, the perfect picture of idleness and gayety. The songs he continued to warble uncertainly were those that the young barons and knights of Nottingham often sang to the chosen maidens of their hearts.

It is not for sewing nor for cutting,
Nor for spinning nor for brushing,
Nor is it for too much sleeping,
But for speaking too much to the knight!
I chide you for it,
Fair Yolande.

Robin Hood chuckled to himself that he had so easily deceived the watch of Sir Guy of Gisborne's castle. They had put him out of their minds, for they had thought him a knight finding his way homeward after an evening of red wine and lovely ladies found at some neighboring lord's table. Then the laughter died on the outlaw's lips and he set forth on his task again. After he had gone nearly all the way round the castle wall and found no one, he stood for a moment, undecided whither to go next and pondered the wisdom of retracing his

steps to question the guards, now quite unsuspicious of him. The night was lifting a little from the sky, leaving it a misty blue, still dark enough to hide Robin Hood's weapons from sight. Suddenly he saw a figure hunched against the wall, and, drawing nearer, he found an ancient palmer asleep against the ivy-covered stones.

Robin Hood touched him lightly on the shoulder.

The old man shuddered with fear as he awoke, and, whining and cringing, sought to run away. But the young man in scarlet held him fast.

"How now, good fellow, I will not harm thee," said Robin Hood. "There is news I want of thee for which I will pay thee in gold and good wishes."

The palmer looked distrustful, but stood quietly under the touch of the other's hand.

"What dost thou wish?" the palmer whined.

"Naught of importance," Robin Hood said merrily. Then leaning forward with a new sternness he said, "Did aught of interest happen at the fair yesterday in Nottingham?"

"Why, how didst thou know I was thinking of that very thing now, sire?"

"What thing? Speak thou quickly."

"Why, that one of Robin Hood's band hath been caught—a fellow that yesterday wore his Lincoln green into Nottingham. Why, everyone knoweth about it. How doth it happen this is news to thee? His name is Will Stutely and he hath a full moon face of good cheer."

"I have been in the neighboring countryside making merry for the past forty-eight hours," said Robin Hood casually. "But tell me, what is to happen to this Will Stutely?" "I'faith, by the good St. Dunstan, the fellow is to die at daybreak. That is why I have slept near you castle where he is imprisoned. When the crowds come to follow him to his death, there may be charity for an old fellow."

"Thanks for thy news. I had heard a man was to be hung and I wished to know who it could be. One of that rough fellow's band doth not interest me mightily, however. Let him hang!"

"Aye," said the palmer, eager to keep on the right side of the rich young stranger, "he will hang all right, though if his sly master knew of his plight, I feel sure that he would some succor send in the shape of bold yeomen with cruelly pointed arrows."

"Aye, that is true," the young man answered. "Indeed, thou speakest wisely. But fare thee well. Here is a gold coin and remember that if Stutely hangs this day, avenged his death will be."

Before the palmer realized that the young noble was taking a strange side in the matter, the scarlet figure had run forward and was lost in the lingering shadows.

"I'faith, he contradicteth himself. First he sayeth that one of rough Robin Hood's band doth not interest him, and then he sayeth if Stutely hang his death will be avenged. The red wine spilled too readily from the cup into that gay fellow's eager throat." And the palmer shook his old head, sorely puzzled at the stranger's actions.

* * *

The rosy gold of dawn flooded the countryside. The air had a coolness about it, a freshness, that betokened a day of summer weather neither too hot nor too cool.

The breeze fanned the cheeks of Will Stutely as he was led forth from the castle. His round eyes searched the crowd eagerly for a familiar face, but found none. Seeing that his plight was in his hands alone, he turned gallantly to the sheriff, saying: "Now seeing that I needs must die, grant me one boon."

The crowd watched him in admiration. His fair hair whipped back by the breeze gave him the look of a Viking standing erect on the prow of his ship, facing the danger of ocean and storm unafraid.

"I pray thee, one boon," the young outlaw's voice begged. "My noble master, Robin Hood, hath never had a man hanged on a tree. It would have to be I, his careless, loving Will Stutely so to distress him. I prithee, let me meet my death a nobler way. Give me a sword in my hand and unbind me. I will fight all of ye until I am stabbed to my death. I would lay me down on English soil to die, with weapon in my hand, and not sway in the morning breeze like a turnip sack on the end of a rope."

"Forswear thy vain words," the sheriff said harshly. "Thy death shall not be by the sword. That death is sharp and clean. Thy death shall be dragging and loathly. Look thou at you gallows. It looks lonely in its emptiness. Go thou and fill that space with thy proud body."

Then Will Stutely cried fiercely, "Unloose me then without a sword and let thy pack upon me. I will fight to the death with mine own hands. Let thy men worry at my heels, tear me in ribbons, snatch at my throat. Damnation for me if I be the first outlaw to swing from yon gallows!"

The sheriff snarled at him angrily, "Nay, thou shalt hang, and if thou art the first outlaw on the gallows, thou wilt not be the last. The gallows awaits thy master. Thou art merely a lesson to him."

"Indeed thou art a dastard coward, a faint-hearted peasant. Dost thou dare to think that thy feeble will could match my Robin Hood's? If thou shouldst ever meet brave Robin Hood, full payment wilt thou receive for my death and all the wickedness that thou dost practice. My master hath little use for thee and all thy cowardly crew. Thou canst capture us only when we carelessly walk into the midst of thy followers as I did. My master shall not be subdued by silly imps of Nottingham."

Then Will Stutely stopped his struggles. He walked toward the gallows with despair in his heart but with the merry smile that Robin Hood had taught him to wear upon his kind face. He smelled the fresh air. The sweet singing of wild birds rang in his ears, and he saw not the curious townsfolk around him. His eyes looked past the cruel silhouette of the gallows, seeking peace in the gray and green of distant hills. Death was near, but he heard not the cold whistle of the wind, the eerie call of spirits—none of the terrifying things he had been told of by the fortune tellers at the fair touched his presence. All about him were music and beauty, and the music was of living things and the beauty was England. Sternly he held himself erect and silent, for his simple heart was torn with the pain of saying farewell to life in all its familiar forms. It was all he could do to keep from crying out bitterly, "I do not want to die." But he remembered the words of Robin Hood, oft repeated in time of danger, "Death is but a quick sharp pain and the end of singing birds and green trees."

Startling then was the voice that broke in upon his reverie.

"I pray thee, Will, before thou diest, take leave of thy dear friends. I'faith, sheriff, 'tis a shame to hold up thy proceedings, but I needs must borrow him from thee for a while."

"Upon him," cried the sheriff. "He hath the build of one Little John of whom ye have all heard. He is the right-hand man of the sly Robin Hood."

But the order of the sheriff was in vain. Swiftly worked Robin Hood's men. Wresting a sword from a guard's hand, Little John cut Will Stutely's bonds, and with the full force of winged arrows upon them, the villagers, the sheriff's men, and even the angry sheriff himself could do naught but run like the wind into the safety of the castle yard.

"Stay! Stay ye!" the taunting voice of Will Stutely followed their retreating figures. "Brave sheriff, how canst thou catch my master if thou dost not even meet him?"

"He goeth like a chip before an onsweeping tide," said Robin Hood reluctantly. "And my good sword must rest in the scabbard, for our work seemeth to be done."

Then Will Stutely turned to the fellows in Lincoln green and with gladness in his eyes he thanked them.

"Little did I think I'd ever meet with ye again, brothers! I dreamed not I'd ever look skyward at our dear Little John or see the gentle reproach in my sweet master's eye." And as he looked at them it seemed as if his blue eyes had caught the blue of the English skies

he had suffered so to part with. His merry smile faded, and a shadow of remembrance passed over his face.

"The hours that have passed, brothers, are like a dark and terrible dream. High in yon tower I stood the night through, and I knew the terror of the caged bird and the snared rabbit. Never did the limitless expanse of countryside look so sweet to my eye." Then he flushed a little to think he had let them see into his heart, but they flung their arms about his shoulders and merry were the welcoming words showered upon him.

"The next time that thou lovest the music of the fair too dearly, Will, remember thou lovest better the music of twanging arrows in Sherwood Forest," smiled Robin

Hood.

TWO RED BIRDS MEET IN SHERWOOD FOREST

And now the outlaws left the outskirts of Nottingham, for though the victory of the day was theirs in the rescue of Will Stutely, it was not Robin Hood's way to prolong a struggle. They made their way back toward the thick and sheltering trees of Sherwood Forest. The bubbling laughter of Will Stutely broke high above the voices of the others. He raced up the hills and would have kissed the very trees by the roadside in sheer delight at being alive if he had not feared the laughter of his mates.

When they reached the safety of the forest they went their own ways, some to shoot deer for the coming feast in honor of Will Stutely's return, some to climb the tall trees to act as sentries for the day, some to lie on the velvety green mosses, half-waking, half-sleeping, filling the dark Vale of Peace with their lazy laughter. Robin Hood, thoughtful over the sheriff's attack upon him, left the others that he might walk alone through the silent glades. When a problem confused his brain, it was his great delight to prowl up and down, his hands in the pockets of his jerkin, his head bent. He reached a little circular pool, crystal clear and silver in the sunlight. Kneeling he drank from it, and the stream of icy water on his dry throat was more grateful than fiery ale. He saw the pool where he had stirred it, a confused swirling mass of tiny waves. The old fascination of his childhood

came upon him, to see himself reflected in the waters. And when the pool had resumed its glassy smoothness, he peered with boyish shyness into its mysterious depths and saw his wide bobbing smile above his scarlet jacket. Laughing, he arose and stood still with wonder at what was before him. On the other side of the crescent pool a nonchalant figure leaned against a great oak, a fellow who was just his size, clad from head to foot in scarlet even as the outlaw was. Laughing blue eyes matched Robin Hood's own, and the stranger's hair was even more golden as it curled petal-like from beneath the red hood.

"And what is this, the rosy dawn upon me, or hath the pool, perchance, turned skyward and is this but mine own reflection beaming upon me?" said Robin Hood gayly.

"Perhaps I am the rising sun, if thou lookest at me with an eye to nature. Certainly none hath more glories

than the sun."

"Ho, thou vain fellow! So conceit ruleth thee! Indeed, should I look at thee with an eye to nature, I would compare thee to the Red Sea."

"Let us look not with an eye to nature then. I like

not thy comparison to the Red Sea."

"I will look then, i'faith, with an eye to battle," retorted Robin Hood, "and see the scarlet of thy death blood."

"Now, on what side of thy couch didst thou arise today, good fellow? Thy tongue is unduly harsh. If thou must speak of death, I can but speak of life. I feel that I resemble, as I stand here in the sunlight, the volcanic glory of crimson wine."

TWO RED BIRDS IN SHERWOOD FOREST 75

"I swear thou shalt soon begin to madden me," said Robin Hood. "I shall stop calling thee names and call myself one. Have a care, gay fellow, I am the flame that shall burn thee if thou dost not address me with more civility."

"And if thou shouldst come near me, Master Flame, I shall dip thee in you pool and put thee out," answered the stranger calmly.

But just as Robin Hood was about to speak again in high anger, the man in scarlet raised a hand to silence him, and Robin Hood saw a herd of deer approaching the little pool. With the instinct of a hunter, he concealed himself in the bushes and saw the stranger do likewise. Before Robin Hood had drawn his bow his startled eyes beheld the flash of the stranger's arrow, and full forty yards away the best of the herd dropped to the ground with the blood streaming from its heart.

Then Robin Hood forgot his passing anger and sprang to his feet crying in good fellowship, "Well shot, well shot, fellow! May I not take thy hand in mine and make thee a bold yeoman of my company?"

"Out of my way," said the stranger haughtily. "Thou botherest me. I like not thy rough words. Begone, lest I give thee a few good buffets with my dainty fists."

"Thou hadst best not buffet me," said Robin Hood, "for though I may seem a forlorn figure to one of thy conceit, I have those who will take my part if I but blow my horn."

"Thou hadst best not blow thy horn," said the stranger, "for as quick as thou dost so, I have but to draw my good broadsword and cut thy blast."

Then Robin Hood's calmness deserted him and he seized a sharply pointed arrow and aimed it murderously at the fellow in scarlet. But even as he pulled back his bow he saw that the stranger had been quicker even than he, and that an arrow was pointed at his own heart. Robin Hood dropped bow and arrow to the ground and saw amazement light the eyes of the stranger at this sudden show of retreat.

"Hold thy hand," said the outlaw. "To shoot would be in vain. There is no dodging of an arrow. One of us would die."

"Then art thou afraid to die?" taunted the stranger.
"No, I am afraid that thou shouldst die," smiled Robin Hood.

Then the stranger's pride was stung, and for a moment he seemed about to send the arrow on its way toward his insolent opponent's heart. But a strange light in the other man's eyes stopped him. It was a gentle spiritual expression and the laughing mouth had grown curiously tender.

"Come," said Robin Hood, "let us take our swords and our broad bucklers and gang under yonder tree. The blunted sword's end can cause no slaying. We will give each other a fair drubbing with its flat side, and at the first sign of blood let our scarlet battle be over."

Readily the stranger agreed, and beneath the overhanging oak the fight began. The swords rang as the two graceful figures in scarlet poised themselves, lunged forward, slashed at each other's bodies, and retreated. The silence was oppressive. Not a bird sang. The sun was lost to view by the heavy lacework of leaves, and in the blue light of the shadowy glade the struggle looked fantastic and unreal. But Robin Hood broke the seeming pantomime by striking home with a fierce blow that broke the stranger's calm manner. From henceforth the struggle was a live one. Cries came from the bearers of the clanging swords, but as yet no drop of crimson blood had proclaimed the battle ended. Then came a harsh discord in the steady crossing of the swords. To Robin Hood's single thrust came a double one from the stranger. On the crown the fellow in scarlet hit him, and the stream of blood that followed was as scarlet as the silken hose the two men wore.

"God 'a' mercy, good fellow!" moaned Robin Hood. "And for this that thou hast done, leave off thy haughty manner for a moment and tell me who thou art and why thou wanderest about in Sherwood Forest alone."

The stranger smiled gayly and answered the bedraggled red bird he had beaten.

"In Maxwell town I was born and bred. My father was Gamwell, a Saxon noble who alone in the surrounding countryside hath held his lands from the Normans and hath managed to keep on fairly good terms with them. Not that he loveth any, mistake thou not my meaning, but so that he might bring his children up in luxury rather than sell them as vassals to the invaders. It seemeth, though, that of late we have been suspected by the most powerful Norman in this part of England, Sir Guy of Gisborne. He put a Norman spy in our midst who acted as my father's steward. I found him with a loose finger in my father's papers, and in the struggle that followed it was my ill hap to slay the varlet. And thus I was forced to this English wood."

"By the brave St. Michael, thou art a fellow after mine own heart! I like thy story well. But why didst thou seek Sherwood Forest? It may prove a dangerous retreat. I have heard it is the home and refuge of a rough fellow called Robin Hood and his band of rude outlaws."

"I'faith, it is that Robin Hood I seek. My mother had an older brother living in another part of England whose name was Hode, and it hath come to my mind many a time that perchance this fellow who calleth himself Robin Hood is my cousin. If he is, then thou art wrong. He cannot be rough, for he cometh of a right noble Saxon family who had not the luck my father had in clinging to the family heritage. Perchance his bravery hath been miscalled."

Then tears filled Robin Hood's eyes, and brokenly he told the beautiful stranger that he was Robin Hood and that indeed his father's name had been Hode, so that perhaps they were kin.

Slowly they made their way back toward the Vale of Peace, and their words took on the changing color of their moods, now brightly glowing with merriment and thankfulness at their meeting, now sad at the thought of the oppression their fathers had felt at the hands of the Normans.

Entering a grove, they came upon Little John resting under the trees, dreaming of his brave and clever master. He rubbed his eyes as he saw the two men in scarlet approaching him.

"I'faith, Robin, dear fellow, are there two of you, or is it that mine eyes are so used to Lincoln green that they magnify thy scarlet?"

"Nay, this is another fellow as well as myself, Little John. A stranger he is who hath just given thy master a sore drubbing."

"Then will I have a bout with him myself and see if I can not avenge thee, good Master," said Little John hotly.

"Nay, nay, Little John, it may not be this time, for he is mine own cousin, though I have lived full ten more years than he. In spite of his youth and his fastidious and courtly mein, I have found him to be ready in wit and skilled in combat, and I have made him a yeoman. He shall be my chief man next to thee, Little John, and shall be called Will Scarlet in remembrance of our encounter in the forest that was like unto the unexpected meeting of two redstarts. We will let him wear his scarlet suit instead of Lincoln green. Methinks he hath enough cunning to hide himself even though he look like the flag of England."

"What, thou callest me names again, cousin," laughed Will Scarlet. "Then truly a name I shall call thee." And dropping gracefully to one knee, he bowed his head and murmured, "Master."

At the sight of his graceful humility, Little John liked the stranger at once and heartily agreed with the outlaw chief, who said happily, "Let Robin Hood, and thou, Little John, and Will Scarlet rule, and long may be the lives of all three."

"And now," said the new outlaw, "I would confide in thee and ask thy advice as to the handling of treachery in our midst."

"He speaketh of Sir Guy of Gisborne, who interesteth us mightily. Is it not so, Little John?"

"Aye, indeed, Master, for never would I have forgiven myself had he carried out his wickedness with the help of the sheriff and put an end to our good-natured Will Stutely. What knowest thou of that sly fellow, Scarlet?"

"It is a matter hard to tell," said Will Scarlet soberly. "There is a plot abroad in Nottingham, but a plot so newly born as to be still vague to eavesdroppers such as myself. From what we have heard and guessed, however, it is a plot of magnitude, reaching its grasping hand from the garden of the good Lord Hugh Fitzwalter to the court of England."

"Is not Lord Hugh a Norman?" asked Little John. "Yes, by blood, but not in spirit. He hath really no feeling of nation or of party. He is, as ye must have heard, a man of deep religious fervor who scarce lives in this world at all. To continue, however, my tale. It reaches the court in this way. King Henry lies upon his deathbed and his eldest son, Richard, may be king tomorrow. As soon as Richard takes the crown he plans to go forth at once on a crusade to the Holy Land, leaving in charge of his affairs in England his mother, the dowager Queen Eleanor, and the chancellor William de Longchamp. Unfortunately he has a brother, Earl John of Mortain."

"But how can such an affair of state concern us at

Nottingham?" said Little John impatiently.

"But hush, Little John," said Robin Hood, "thou art not courteous enough to the bearer of this news. I can see a little light in this dark narrative. But come, explain, good cousin, for there is much confusion attending my guesses."

"The matter is only too clear," said Will Scarlet sternly. "Sir Guy of Gisborne hath persuaded Earl John to join him in his wickedness, and as soon as Richard leaves England, John will see that he is kept abroad and will take the kingdom into his own hand. And John, being but a weakling, a tool in the hands of Sir Guy, it meaneth that Sir Guy of Gisborne will veritably rule England."

The full realization of Will Scarlet's words did not come to the fearful hearts of Robin Hood and Little John for several moments. It was a matter of terrible importance, and their courageous spirits sank as they viewed the matter after their first angry outburst.

"Then all the good that Richard plans to do for the Saxons is worse than left undone," sighed Robin Hood. "Earl John, powerful in his brother's absence, will bring the fearful blight of another Norman conquest upon us."

"And how doth the good Lord Hugh come into this affair?" asked Little John.

"As far as his death, I fear me," said Will Scarlet somberly. "He plans to go with King Richard to the Holy Land, and, of course, when Richard is captured those with him will be killed that they may not repeat what they have seen. And further rumor goeth that Lord Hugh hath a little daughter whom he is putting under the guardianship of Sir Guy."

"What!" cried Robin Hood. "That lovely, winsome child that rode upon my shoulder some year or more ago! What harm thinkest thou Sir Guy plans for that delicate flower?"

"He will marry her to his piggish, good-for-nothing son, Geoffrey, I am told. The girl will be forced into it.

She loveth her father dearly and hath the patrician's ideal of holding high and unstained the family honor. Sir Guy hath got her father badly in his debt, and when Maid Marian knoweth this, and findeth her father dead and unable to pay back the sums he has borrowed, she will give herself into Sir Guy of Gisborne's hands, the living payment of her father's debt."

"A right noble thing to do," said Robin Hood, "but far too great a sacrifice for a lady of her sweetness and purity. I see, Little John, that, as Will Scarlet hath said, this plot is of great magnitude. Its hands reach out into the future, and it is not yet deeply enough embedded in the past to be uprooted. We must wait, on into years perhaps, until we can catch the weak Earl John redhanded and fight the wicked Sir Guy unto his death."

"Thou art right, Master," Will Scarlet answered. "And we fight not just for Marian's sweet honor and her father's debt; we fight for the future of the Saxons. We fight for Richard the Lion-hearted, king of a brighter tomorrow whose dream is the dream of you and me, to see a union of Normans and Saxons with neither suppressed, a welding of these two noble races into one living thing—England."

The three sat in close communion until night came upon them. The golden moon flooded the skies and the peace of the summer evening quieted their stirred hearts.

"It is waiting that is hardest," Robin Hood mused. "When I was a child I could scarcely bear my weakness, so great was my desire to fight the Norman lord who ruled my father. But the game of the hunter is to wait. We will go about our daily pastimes. Laughter will ring

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in our hearts, for a long face getteth a man nowhere except into the grave. But we will watch the actions of those who further this treacherous plot and in the end outplay them."

Then in each man's heart a different thought came, and if the thoughts had been voiced, each outlaw's character would have been seen clearly.

"Is she beautiful, I wonder?" thought the sentimental Will Scarlet. "And is her hair the raven black of a Fitzwalter, or hath it caught some of the bronze of the English sun?"

And Little John pondered seriously. "Will my master go beyond his depths in his efforts to rescue his people. Should death come upon him, all light would go from the life of his fellows."

And what thought Robin Hood? Who dares to guess? His stern mouth spoke of battle and revenge. His noble carriage cried out in protest against the treachery he had just heard. The light in his eyes was as gentle as a poet's. Though his expression bespoke sadness, laughing was his voice as he roused his comrades from their reveries.

"How now, a lady is it thou art dreaming of, dainty Will Scarlet? Come now, I saw thee stroke thy silken hair. Thou thinkest thou art a beauty, it may be? And thou, grim Little John, thou hast aged a century since thou hast fallen into such gloomy thought. Come now, we have turned faint-hearted at our task. Ye have thought that Robin Hood knew not the danger we will meet. Fear not, my sweet Virgin watcheth over me. And perchance she asks me, in return to guard Maid Marian."

And half in awe and half in worship, Little John and Will Scarlet listened to the rich, full notes of Robin Hood's song wing their way to the heavens, and the fervent words he sang told them of his loving, trusting heart:

Oh Maria! Constellation!
Inspiration! Elevation,
Rule and Law and Ordination
of the angel's host!
Highest height of God's creation
Pray your Son's commiseration
Lest, by fear or fraud, salvation
For our souls be lost.

THE SEEKING OF FRIAR TUCK

For several days the gray gloom of a steady summer rain had kept the outlaws under cover. Eagerly they opened their eyes each day, for little they liked the chill mistiness of the air and the darkness of the sky above. At last a golden morning greeted them. Almost magically the wet undergrowth dried, the shiny green leaves stopped their monotonous dripping, and shafts of sunlight, yellow as honey, turned the forest into a shadowland of black twisted trees against the amber haze. Not a fellow among the band had a single thought except for play. They stretched their long legs, pillowed their heads on the hot mossy beds, and scattered to the four winds in search of adventure. They pounced upon one another from brushwood hiding places—they pursed their lips to make bird calls to the startled amazement of the thrush and warbler hidden in the trees, and they plucked the feathers of the gray goose to fasten to the shafts of their arrows.

Will Stutely, round and good-natured, preferred the moss bed with the sun pouring down upon his lazy body. His eyes watched the white clouds overhead shifting with slow, ponderous movements into castle walls and church spires and fleecy, irregular lambs gamboling on fields of blue. Quite suddenly the look of peace faded from Will's face. Forth from a leafy thicket stepped Little John, looking like a very giant of a man to the outlaw who lay upon the ground. His head stooped to avoid the

lowest branches that a tall man might touch with fingertips upthrust. His were the shoulders and chest of a deep-withered ox, yet he strode lightly as a girl on her way to church, and something in the manner of his approach had an immediate effect on poor Will. To his knees he got in a flash and his flesh quivered like jelly set down by a careless hand.

"Spare me thy naughty pranks, Little John," he implored. "Nay, keep thy distance, man! St. Vitus seize thee if thou but touchest my nose with that thistlethorn! Ouch! Ouch! I say thee, thy gambols are too broad to bear with. I'll tell the Master of thy wickedness. Stop it, thou toadstool of humanity!"

But chatter and prate as he would, Will, who was the target of all good-natured play, could check not the calm advance of the gigantic fellow who, with the bough of a thorny shrub in his right hand, was soon occupied in scratching the unhappy face before him.

"Bodikins! Squirm not so, dear Will, but smell the juicy little buds of my hawthorn. I plucked it fresh for thee."

And the elephant of a man wriggled his nettle spray under the nose of his victim, the while he sang tunefully, half choked with laughter though he was:

> It was a maid of my countree, As she came by a hawthorn tree As full of flowers as might be seen, She marveled to see the tree so green.

To his feet flashed Will with a swiftness that none could have imagined possible in so portly a person, and away he tore as if all the furies were after him. Straightway Little John followed, and the two of them, bursting

through a screen of foliage, tumbled into the very presence of Robin Hood himself.

For a while they rolled upon the ground, too weak from mirth to put aught of strength or cunning into their wrestling, and finally a halt was called, for the battle had fallen into naught but a tickling match.

"Come now," Robin Hood said mischievously. "I've a fear in my heart that all my outlaws have forgotten the use of the arrow since the heavens fell and caused us to go without practice these last three days. Which of you can draw a good bow and kill a buck or a fat doe? Or come, who of you can kill a hart of Greece five hundred feet away?"

In a trice the arrows were whipped forth and the men in Lincoln green hid themselves to await the approach of their target. The first to shoot was Will Stutely, but he missed his aim by a fraction, much to the merriment of his comrades.

"I'faith, Little John hath made me nervous," he groaned. "His hawthorn hath been my undoing. Dear Master, I prithee, forgive that shot and blame it on that long fellow beside thee."

And after Will Scarlet had killed a buck and Robin Hood himself had shot a deer, Little John brought a gasp of amazement from them by sending a hart of Greece to its death full five hundred feet from him.

"God's blessing on thy heart," said Robin Hood.
"That is a shot. By heaven, I would ride my horse a hundred miles to find one could match thee."

Then Will Scarlet laughed and said, "Master, I wish that Little John might be the victor of all England, but I feel it my great duty to inform thee that there lives in Fountains Abbey a certain curtal friar who can beat all

of you."

"Thou speakest the truth, Scarlet? After a shot so great as that we have just seen, I feel inclined to doubt thy word somewhat."

"Nay, Master, the curtal friar in Fountains Abbey

can draw a strong bow."

"I'faith, by the good St. Dunstan, I shall neither eat nor drink until I have set eyes upon this friar. Yea, by sweet Mary herself, I shall seek him out straightway. How can I tell when I meet this fellow? There are many friars in the abbey, are there not?"

"Yea, Master, but this friar is as different from all friars as we, Master, are different from highway robbers. He is a master of a friar. He is as round as a ball and hath a great bald head around which groweth a fringe of stringy hair. His smile is such that thou must smile in return no matter how sour is thy heart. And his fist can smite, and he can read the mass as none other, and his language is so cluttered up with Latin and church talk he can scarce be understood. But you will see him, Master, because he will see thee. He sees with one eye all that goes on about Fountains Abbey, for they say that muttering the scriptures all the day long bores him mightily, and so there is no doubt but that he will come to meet thee."

Then Robin Hood put on his head a cap of steel and clapped his good broadsword and buckler to his side. With an arrow peering ominously forth from the sheath at his belt and with his bow in his hand, he set forth to Fountaine Dale in Yorkshire where Fountains Abbey stood in a quiet vale near the river Ripon. Following his

white horse, his band of outlaws rode to the forests bordering the abbey, where Robin Hood ordered them to hide while he went forth alone to meet the famous friar.

Following the road that wound its way to a hilltop, Robin Hood urged his horse forward eagerly. He was impatient to meet the rotund little friar whose skill in archery had been reported far and wide. And more than that, he longed to feast his eyes on the abbey of "Our Lady of the Water Springs," as Fountains often was called. The hilltop reached, a sudden turn through a grove of trees, and a magnificent sight greeted Robin Hood. From the high ground he looked down the long lane of blue-gray trees arched above a silver stream leading like a pathway to the snow-white towers of the church. The ghostly walls stood apart from the old gnarled yew trees. All the other abbeys that Robin Hood remembered were covered with ivy and half hidden by the softening green of shrubbery. But Fountains Abbey had been left unadorned, and faced the world starkly beautiful in its pure delicacy.

The outlaw galloped his horse down into the vale. All about him the birds sang in welcome, and so deserted was the grove he began to think a magic spell had been cast over the beautiful place. As he stood, hesitant, half fearful lest he break the enchantment of his surroundings, a sight so grotesque and out of place met his eyes that he could scarce keep from bursting into hearty laughter. Coming down the velvety carpet of soft green moss that led away from the cold and lovely cloister, quite unaware of any watchful eye, came a friar. He had seized the lower part of his robe and drawn it high above his bare fat knees and was tripping it as light as

any dancer at the king's court, stopping ever and anon to leap into the air and clap his feet together, swaying perilously each time and groaning and blowing like a bellows.

So this is my fat friar! thought Robin Hood. And straightway he formed a plan to test the stranger's humor.

"Bodikins, dear chaplain, I am fair dizzy at the sight of thy curvetting. Methinks thou hast had thy play, now 'tis time for a task. Carry me over the water, thou curtal friar, or else thy curvetting will soon be done to the music of golden harps."

To Robin Hood's secret amazement, the friar said never a word, but merely dropped his robes and, taking Robin Hood on his back, strode through the icy water of the little stream to the other side.

Safely there, Robin Hood leaped from his friar's back. At once the friar faced him, saying idly, "Now, do thou carry me over this water, thou fine fellow, or I fear me the nice green suit thou wearest will suffer a sore beating."

Angry words were upon Robin Hood's lips, but he held them back and with a gentle shrug took the friar on his back and with neither good nor bad retort carried the fat fellow back from whence they had come. Dropping his burden to the ground, Robin Hood looked straight into the round expressionless eyes of the friar and spake commandingly:

"Carry me back over yonder stream, curtal frair, or it shall breed thee pain."

As if the stageman had pulled a string in a puppet show, the stocky little ecclesiastic ponderously took the great outlaw upon his back once more, and without speaking stepped into the icy waters of the little stream. Robin Hood was sore puzzled at this marvelous display of good nature, and began to think he must give in to this merry fellow. So deep in thought was he, he noticed not the friar's hesitancy as he reached the middle of the stream. It was with breathless suddenness that the outlaw was plunged into the water, and as his head sank into the shining depths, he heard the friar speak for the first time in the voice of one speaking the Scriptures. A gorgeous volume of tone reverberated from the banks of the river, a deep resonant chanting:

"And choose thee, choose thee, fine fellow, whether thou wilt sink or swim."

In a trice they reached the shore, and Robin Hood had pulled forth an arrow before the friar had finished shaking the drops of water from his few locks of hair. The outlaw let fly the arrow, striking purposely the steel buckler that the friar wore, so that there should be no blood shed in his warning. The friar did not so much as dodge. He continued shaking himself like a soaked spaniel, and his voice rang out in measured beats:

"Shoot on, shoot on, thou fine fellow! Shoot as thou hast begun. Shoot thou all the summer's day. Thou canst not so much as ruffle my humor or my heart."

Then came a battle between these two that has since given fame to each. From ten o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon they fought. From arrows they turned to their swords and bucklers, and thence to their fists. And Robin Hood grew pale and felt his knees shaking as with the ague, while the marvelous little friar was like unto a fighting cock, jaunty in his manner, quick to leap away from the blows meant for him, and wary was his aim in return.

Robin Hood's thoughts were fantastic as any in a dream. He seemed to see in the fat friar's face a red moon mocking him. Time and again his eyes would catch a vision of gnarled trees opening their arms to catch him. The golden sun blinded his eyes and made the friar a spotted imp covered with green and scarlet blotches. Better to die than to give in to this smiling opponent. Better to die and be cool than to feel the fierce heat of the sky melting one's very body. But Robin Hood had no foolishness about him, and he saw that he would not be a hero at all, falling in a battle fought for no greater purpose than a day's prank. So as the shadows of late afternoon and the blessed coolness of waning day came over the vale, the outlaw chief fell to his knees and begged a boon of the friar.

"I beg thee, curtal friar, for one boon. See, thou hast brought me to my knees, and for my humility thou canst not deny me my wishing. I prithee give me leave to set my horn to my mouth and to blow three blasts."

The friar surveyed the hot dusty figure before him and, with the manner of one who understands not or cares not what such a strange boon signifies, said, "That I will do. Blow! Blow on! Blow till the wind bloweth back and both thy eyes fall out."

Then Robin Hood remembered that Roland had not strength enough to blow his horn when he so needed help from his army, and a great fear came over him that he would not have the breath to summon his outlaws, and that he would be in the ridiculous position of a fellow pursing his lips to whistle yet making no sound.

With lungs nearly bursting, he blew three feeble blasts, and at once half a hundred yeomen who had been lurking in the groves near by came hurrying over the lea, their bows bent ready for battle.

For a moment the friar's round face sagged in surprise and consternation.

"And whose men are these that come so hastily from the wood to interrupt our brief exercise?" he said to Robin Hood.

"These men are mine," Robin Hood retorted casually, adding with a careless flip of the hand, "and what is that to thee?"

"Nothing to me, gay sire, but I wish for a boon likewise. Come now, a boon, a boon for me. Like thy three blasts, I prithee, let me set my fist to my mouth and bay the treetops thrice."

"That will I do," Robin Hood said, feeling quite secure surrounded by his men. "I would indeed be a sorry fellow if I did not return thy courtesy, but I fear me that thy three shouts will not bring forth such good luck as I have been accorded. Friars are not all like thee, worthy chaplain, and if three hundred come tripping in their long robes at thy call, my men in Lincoln green can push them all back into yon abbey."

The friar did not even turn his head to listen to Robin Hood's boasting. He put his clenched fist to his lips and three strange and haunting cries echoed over the vale. And across the lea came a strange sight—one hundred bandogs with ears drawn tautly back and white teeth shining, their beating paws turning up the turf, so swift was their approach.

The friar no longer smiled. He turned upon the fellow who had battled the day away, and said sternly:

"Behold, a dog for every man, and I myself for thee."

Then Robin Hood's good sense came to his rescue, and he saw that his teasing of early morning had brought disaster upon him. In a gentle voice he turned the friar's threats aside, "Nay, by my faith, friar, this may not be. Let us forget our madness."

Two dogs were at once upon Robin, and his Lincoln green suit lay in ribbons on the turf, while the marks of their claws streaked his brown body with scarlet scratches.

North, south, east, and west the brave outlaws fled, and from the security of the surrounding thickets tried to shoot the dogs that threatened their master. But the dogs were taught to stand poised and ready, and their sharp little eyes watched each arrow in its curving flight, only to have their great jaws open ready to catch the arrows in their mouth, stopping their flight by the tight clamping of their white teeth about the slender shafts—or such was the outlaws' story.

Then a stalwart giant of a fellow cried out in terror, "Take up thy dogs, friar. At my bidding, stop this battle, for my master will never more cry hold after thou hast ignored his peace offering, and he must not die."

"Whose man art thou who darest to prate with me as to the fate of this fellow who hath carried his pranks too far?" said the friar. "Indeed, had my dogs not attacked him, his men would have fallen upon me."

"Nay, nay, friar. I am Little John, the comrade of one famous outlaw, Robin Hood, who lieth there on the ground, hurt by thy cruel bandogs. We should not have hurt thee, and if thy dogs are not called off at once, a battle such as thou hast never seen the like of will be fought on this lea, no matter how many of us lie dead and wounded at its close."

Then Little John shot forth a dozen arrows with such amazing speed a few great dogs were surprised into death, and as their noble heads fell, the little friar cried a halt to the terrible proceedings.

"Hold thy hand, good fellow. Thy master and I will agree."

The dogs turned at their master's call and ran swiftly back toward the abbey, and Robin Hood stood up weakly, pale but smiling at his adventure.

"If thou wilt forsake fair Fountains Abbey, good friar, we shall make thee a most special member of our band. Under the greenwood tree thou shalt say us a sweet and serious mass when our hearts have grown too gay, and every Sunday throughout the years a gold noble shall be thy fee, and on every holiday a new robe shalt be thine with as much gilt and scarlet upon it as the bishop himself weareth."

The friar put on a right sober face as he meditated about the matter. His heart had been stirred at the loyalty of Robin Hood's men, and he liked the willingness of the outlaw chief to hold out his hand to one who had so nearly been the death of him. At last he smiled, and simultaneously all who watched him smiled in answer, for it was as Will Scarlet had said, a grin so crooked and yet so contagious that no matter how sour one's spirit was, he could but answer such a merry soul with kindred gayety.

"Methinks the greenwood would be an excellent place for me," the friar said seriously. "Thou knowest, perhaps, that Fountains Abbey owes its existence to a movement toward a stricter form of religious life, and i'faith it suiteth me not, this stricter life. Furthermore, the

Cistercians, for so we are called who live in the abbey. have chosen this lonely vale to live in that they may be apart from the distracting thoughts of worldly peoples. In the proper season, we are put to work in the fields. Under the burning sun we toil from dawn till dark, and when the cold of winter comes upon us we are confined to our cells alone with our copying. The friars with clumsy fingers like mine own must work upon parchment made from the skin of sheep. Those fellows whom the good God hath given sensitive and gentle hands use vellum made with great care from lambs. They can find amusement in the coloring of twisting initials with red and green and gold, while I needs must copy the heavy lines alone. And what reward is given us, thou askest? None of bodily comfort, brethren, none of earthly joy. For every letter, line, and point a sin is forgiven me."

"And of course thou hast no sins. Marry, thy lot

is a hard one," laughed Robin Hood.

"By the good St. Dunstan," sighed the friar, "I can bear it little longer—this loneliness. The nightingales sing sad songs in yonder groves, and the wind wails in the treetops after dark. No one comes near the abbey, for its chaste white walls are like silent mysterious ghosts to the fancies of the peasant folk, and I long for a good companion to slap upon the back and sing a merry song to after the mass has been said. I will go with thee gladly, but I would go first with Robin Hood beside me to bid farewell to Our Lady and to look once more into the cellar room where a bit of cake awaits me." Here he coughed slyly behind his hand.

"And some brown October ale, I'll wager," smiled Robin Hood.

Laughing, the outlaws crowded about this fat, gay little friar, and then, at a sign from Robin Hood, they scampered back toward their horses concealed in the groves and set forth to Nottingham.

Approaching the abbey, the friar pointed out the giant elm which stood in the middle of the valley and the seven great yew trees, called the seven sisters, that had sheltered the first little band that had assembled with Prior Richard as their abbot upon Christmas day in the year 1132 to found for themselves a monastery.

North of the great cloister stood the church, and hither Robin Hood and his guide turned their footsteps. Through the doorway the low chanting of monks' voices could be heard, and when Robin Hood's eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness, he saw the gleaming altar inlaid with silver and gold and the ivory-faced Virgin with her elusive smile and gentle wistfulness. The rushing memories that swept through his mind nearly overpowered him. He wanted to reach out his hands and touch the waxen garments that she wore. She seemed to sway a little as she brooded over the monks kneeling at her feet. Robin Hood felt the tears of loneliness in his eyes—her loneliness, aloof and beckoning; his loneliness, baffled and worshiping.

His mouth drawn with pain, he turned away from her and sought the haven of the grove that swung him back to the familiar lanes of Sherwood Forest. He forgot his sadness as he saw the fat little friar waddling toward him.

"Well, good Robin Hood, I have told the saintly abbot, Robert of Pipewell, of my departure. A fact, I fear me, that pleaseth him rather than causeth him

distress, for he is a man of great virtue and understandeth not my leanings toward comradeship. Every time I give a sad-faced friar a poke in the ribs, the abbot confines me straightway in the storehouse. Now he feeleth that I am spreading the gospel, so that my soul is not entirely lost, yet I am not spreading my mischief among his ranks at the same time. He can well afford to bid me farewell."

"Robert of Pipewell is the abbot, then?" said Robin Hood. "I'faith, I did not know you friars ever had a proper name, so all alike ye are in somber black garment and holy mien. Then thou hast a name, good fellow, I trust. My fellows will nickname thee 'friar,' there is no doubt, but hast thou a surname to go therewith?"

"Yea, my name is Friar Tuck, and so may thy outlaws call me. As long as thou presentest me with a gold noble on each Sabbath and a bit of candied fruit throughout the year, I shall serve thee with loyalty and love, good Robin Hood."

The two strange comrades mounted their horses and rode toward the hilltop. Here they paused to look back at Fountains Abbey, and the pale and slender tower was like the figure of a woman in the moonlight, a waxen swaying figure brooding over the monks who lay at her feet.

MIDGE, THE MILLER'S SON, PLAYS BEGGAR

"The King is dead! Long live the King!" The cry was heard throughout England and reached the little town of Nottingham through no less a person than Earl John himself, who told of his father's tragic death in mocking terms. The news spread quickly, and soon those in the deep of Sherwood Forest discussed the happenings of His Majesty's last hours. Will Scarlet, who had many a friend in court and had kept his acquaint-anceship with one Roger de Lacy, a frequenter of the castle of Nottingham and indolent well-wisher of Norman and Saxon alike, brought the story to Robin Hood and his men.

"I'faith, there is a magic in life," Will said dreamily. "It seemeth as if God or the fates watch over us indeed, and as if Nature is but the symbol of their power, ready to warn us, to take our part, to beat us into submission."

"All very well, Master Scarlet," said fat Friar Tuck impatiently, "but what hath this pretty talk to do with the death of His Majesty, King Henry?"

"Only this, friar—suffer thyself to be patient—scarce a week before the King's death, he set forth upon his horse to a plain between Tours and Azay-sur-Cher to make peace terms with Philip of France. Scarce had their horses met upon the plain when, just as they conversed together, there came a loud clap of thunder, though they do say the sky was cloudless, and a bolt of

lightning fell between them without doing either any harm."

"By the Mother of Christ," gasped the friar, crossing himself superstitiously.

"What did the feeble Henry then?" asked Robin Hood

with interest.

"In faith, what did the two of them! Royal and blue their blood may be, but cowardice runneth in their veins. They turned their horses' heads and fled swiftly from the plain to the thickets. But after they had waited, I am told, the sky still blue, the sun still golden, they set forth once more to rejoin each other."

"Marry," quoth the friar, "I cannot bear this. What

then happened?"

"Another clap of thunder, louder than the first, and the king of England waited not for the bolt to strike. He fell from his horse, fainting, for he saw that destiny had struck him, and destiny can be as fatal as any ball of fire."

"Did thy friend Roger tell thee anything of Richard's feelings now that his father has left him, coz?" said

Robin Hood.

"Yea. Richard hath a streak of cruelty in him, I fear me, but it needs cruelty to bring the Normans into submission. And he will not display his anger toward the Saxons, I feel sure, since he desires a true union with them."

"What streak of cruelty did the eldest son display?" the friar asked.

"Only that he kissed his father in execution of the treaty of peace, and got for an answer, 'If God would only spare my life till I were revenged on thee!"

"It looketh to me as if the father had the streak of

cruelty," said Will Stutely wonderingly.

"Nay," Robin Hood answered him sadly. "The father was indeed sore pressed by his wayward sons. If Henry had only been on the side of the Saxons, he would have brought England greater good than she has had for many a long year. Now I put my faith in Richard, who hath his father's marvelous ability to command."

"Yea, Robin," answered Little John, "but I have it from the good Lord Fitzwalter himself that Richard starts at once upon a crusade. His genius for command

doth England little good now."

"Thou art right," Will Scarlet nodded. "Roger de Lacy hath said that already Earl John winks at Guy of Gisborne, saying, 'When England is mine, it is yours, old fellow'; and thou knowest what a man John is. While Richard was his father's enemy, he at least engaged in open warfare, while the poor sick father knew naught of John's deceit, for it was not until he asked the names of Richard's party that he found his youngest son among them. Then they say the coldness of death came near him and he cried piteously, 'Is it true, indeed, that John, my heart, my favorite son, he whom I cherished more than all the rest; he, my love for whom has brought upon me all my misfortunes—is it indeed true that he has abandoned me? Let all things go as they will. I care no longer for myself or for the world."

"Yea, Richard brought disaster upon a king's head, but John brought the grief and sorrow that kills a father's

heart," said Robin Hood.

"Where lies the King?" asked Little John.

"At Fontevrault, the great nunnery a few miles south of Chinon in France. And so hated was he no shroud covered him, no officiating priests wished to attend him, and the only insignia of royalty that he wore was an old scepter and ring of no value. And in default of a crown, the head was encircled with a sort of diadem made with some gold fringe from a woman's dress. So lay Henry, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet; king of England; duke of Normandy, Aquitaine, and Brittany; earl of Anjou and Maine; lord of Tours and Amboise."

"Well, so be it," sighed Will Stutely, "the King is

dead."

"Long live the King!" cried Robin Hood, and together the outlaws knelt with one accord before the invisible figurehead newly come to England.

"Methinks, Scarlet, I would do well to meet thy friend Roger de Lacy. From henceforth the castle of Nottingham will be of more than ordinary interest to me. Canst thou start forth at once to acquaint me with thy lazy good-natured friend?" asked Robin Hood.

"Indeed, Master, 'twill be his pleasure and mine own. Often have we spoken of thee in the past when naught but thy fame had met with us. He loveth well a mystery

and will keep thy presence one."

"Then," said Robin Hood, "let us attire ourselves in rich garments so that our visit upon him will excite no comment from the other nobles of Nottingham."

Straightway Will clapped his hands with joy, for he loved best of all to adorn himself in soft velvets and rich jewels. A cloak of blood-red cloth, trimmed with miniver, with a collar of ermine, Robin Hood himself wore. His girdle was a wide band of fine gold fastened with a

sparkling clasp of precious stones, and he covered his head with a scarlet cap edged with fur. And Will, tired of the scarlet costume given him for his name's sake, wore a shade of deep olive green and over it a cloak of kingly purple.

It was late afternoon when Robin and Will set out for Nottingham, and a tall wind was blowing over the meadows. The golden grain swayed to the ground, and a soft swishing sound reached their ears. Scarce had they left Sherwood a hundred yards behind when a loud halloo reached them. They turned to see Friar Tuck running lightly after them. He reached them, puffing and rosy, saying:

"Thou mayst need me, Master, and I am fair tired of the greenwood this day."

Then he turned slowly around, with his short arms outspread prettily and asked them their opinion on what he wore.

"Thinkest thou this mantle and hood of good Flanders cloth and the bit of fur on my sleeves make me look like a high church dignitary? Bodikins, if I am to travel with knights and squires as ye two have decked yourselves to be, methought I must live up to the standard."

"Yea," smiled Robin Hood, "thou lookest indeed like a true ecclesiastic of high order. Thy fatness bespeaks a good table, and the look of smugness on thy rosy face telleth me thou art rich in purse and not so rich in thought."

"How darest thou speak thus to me!" exclaimed the friar indignantly. "True, I lie well covered at night, and I eat plenty when it is day, but what is this about not having a thought? So many thoughts have I, dear

Master, they jostle one another, they cry for more room, and trip and fall before they see the light of the world."

"Ha," laughed Will Scarlet, "and what, prithee, are

thy thoughts made upon?"

"Not maidens, anyhow," replied the friar haughtily.

Robin Hood, to stop the quarrel that now threatened in earnest, raised his bow and shot an arrow along the white road, a form of play he often indulged in, crying to his companions:

"By the sweet Virgin, whoever reaches the arrow first

is the best man!"

Their race was a pretty sight. Will Scarlet, slender and graceful as a girl, led at the beginning, his purple cloak wide-spread behind him, a butterfly's wing in full flight. Robin ran easily, his head erect, a steady pace that betokened a wealth of energy kept in reserve. And the friar galloped, loped, skipped, leaped, and finally waddled to a shameful position in the rear.

It was Robin's victory, close-won indeed, for Scarlet nearly tripped over his chief's heels as they reached the arrow pinned upright into the road.

Laughing together, they heeded not the piteous cry that Friar Tuck set up behind them. Not until the friar's voice assumed his monkish chanting, did they turn to him. And here indeed was a sorry sight. Doubled up, his hands on his fat side, the friar was shaking his head mournfully, and crying:

"Bodikins, a stitch in my side, please, prithee, I beg of thee, God in Heaven, bring me relief. A stitch, a stitch! Oh, Heaven, what a twinge!"

Robin Hood hurried to his side and commenced to rub him gently, hiding as best he could the mirth he felt at the fat friar's unhappy plight. Then moaned the friar:

"If I but had some red nettle, feverfew, and plantain seethed in butter! There is a charm indeed for a sudden stitch, with a pretty little poem to say with it to frighten it away."

Will Scarlet, though his shoulders were shaking with suppressed laughter, controlled his voice and spoke with deep sympathy.

"I say thee, friar, try the poem without the red nettle. Perhaps it may work for a little stitch like this that hath befallen thee."

"A little stitch, indeed," roared the friar. "May the blight fall upon thee! May thou have a stitch but half as bad as this descend to thee! Ah me, love o' mercy, I can scarce bear it."

"Try the charm," Robin Hood soothed him.

So, screwing his fat face into a mask of woe and misery, Friar Tuck began to speak in a weak and mournful monotone:

Out spear, not in, spear!

If therein there be a bit of iron,

The work of witches, it shall melt!

If thou wert shot in the skin, or wert shot in the flesh,

Or wert shot in the blood,

Or wert shot in the limb, never may thy life be harmed!

If it were a shot of gods, or if it were a shot of elves,

Or if it were a shot of witches, now will I help thee.

This to thee as a remedy for the shot of gods, this to thee as a remedy for the shot of elves,

This to thee as a remedy for the shot of witches; I will help thee Flee to the mountain-head!

Be thou whole, the Lord help thee!

Then followed much groaning and wailing on the part of the friar. At last a wide smile spread over his face and he said to his companions:

"All is well with me, brethren. The charm hath worked."

"Dost thou know many other charms?" asked Robin Hood.

"Indeed, indeed," the friar waved his hand in affected patronage. "There is the charm for swarming bees. Take earth, throw it up with thy right hand from under thy right foot and say a little verse, then throw dust over them when they swarm and say another. There is a charm for bewitched land, for lost cattle, and many others that a thoughtful mind grasps easily and keeps conveniently at hand for just such an occasion as this one. Thou wouldst do well to learn from me, Master."

But Robin Hood heard not the last words of the friar, and perhaps it is just as well or they might have quarreled in earnest. He was intent upon searching the road ahead, for they had neared Nottingham and the outlaw chief had no desire to meet enemies upon the open highway

"Hold, brethren," he said suddenly. "I see the dust rising a little on the top of yon hill. A man approacheth. He looketh like a beggar as he draweth nearer. He weareth a dusty cloak, and he carrieth a bag or two, dragging them along easily as if there were naught in them but old clothes. I will go on ahead and have some merriment with him. Thou, Will and Friar Tuck, too, sit ye in yon shade and rest awhile after our heated race."

Willingly the friar ran to the great beech trees that grew along the road and lay full length upon the ground,

muttering Latin phrases to himself and deigning not to speak to Will Scarlet who seated himself near him.

When Robin Hood drew near to the approaching beggar, he felt some surprise at the youth of the fellow. All thought of giving him aid left the outlaw's heart, for he wondered at the idleness of one so young and strong, content merely to gather in old bags the cast-off clothing and food of the good people of Nottingham.

"I prithee, a coin, sire," the beggar whined.

"Nay," said Robin Hood sternly, "thou art the one who wilt give me a coin. I feel very sure that a beggar carrieth the last coin he was given, and who knows, perhaps the next to the last, and the next to that one. I say thee, without delay, hand it to me, or I will put an arrow through the thick of thy lazy body."

Before Robin Hood could see the effect of his challenge upon the worthless vagabond, the beggar had dropped his bags and brought into sight a staff so far hidden from sight behind his long coat. Robin Hood's bow and arrow flew from his hands, splintered into a dozen pieces, and before he could reach his horn, the blows began to fall upon him thick and fast.

"Dost thou know who I am?" cried Robin Hood.

"A sire, that is enough to know," said the beggar, laying lusty slaps until Robin Hood could speak no more. The battered outlaw fell in a swoon, a crumpled figure in scarlet lying in the white dust.

The beggar looked not again at his vanquished opponent. He strode on down the road, whistling a little, dragging his bags after him. When he came opposite to the beech trees two figures leaped upon him, and he looked into the red face of a fat ecclesiastic and another

squire more beautifully attired than the one he had just felled. Fear came upon him when he saw their angry faces, and, struggling, he tried to drop his bags and run.

"Grant me my life for Him that died on the tree,"

he begged.

"That is a right noble suggestion," said the friar.
"Thou shalt die upon the tree yonder in the grove of beeches, the tall straight tree with the branch just off the ground, an admirable place for a hanging."

"Why shouldst thou wish me death? I have done

thee no harm," said the beggar.

"Thou liest," answered Will Scarlet hotly. "Perhaps thou has done more harm than thou knowest. Thou hast near slain the gentlest man that e'er was born."

"Nay, I but defended myself, and he is not slain. He only sleepeth for a while, I swear," moaned the beggar.

"Let us about with the killing," said the friar. "Our master may need us. Listen fellow, before thou diest, remember this, thou hast met with Robin Hood."

And now there was wonder as well as terror on the beggar's face, and he looked at Will Scarlet fearfully.

"Nay, I am not Robin Hood," Will answered his questioning eyes. "The beautiful fellow lying yonder in the dust is he. Now, dost thou wonder at our desire to hang thee?"

"I prithee," the captured boy begged, "do not kill me. Robin Hood doth not kill, the rumor goeth. He liketh to take a fellow's possessions, however. If I ope up yonder bags for you, you will find in a secret hiding place within an hundred pounds, and much more in odd silver that I will give you if ye will let me but keep my life."

Will and the friar whispered together and decided to take the beggar's money and tie him up until they could ask their master what his punishment would be. Well knew they Robin Hood's vow to the Virgin to take no human life, and they did not wish to fall into his disfavor.

"Open the bags, then," they ordered him.

Carelessly they watched him bend over his sacks, wondering a little as Robin Hood had at the fellow's fine body and round clean face. A strange beggar indeed, and deserving of little sympathy. They watched him feel in the open mouth of the great sack and saw him draw forth a smaller bag that seemed to be of great weight. He used both hands to draw it out and to lift it high in the air.

"Thou likest a gesture," said Will Scarlet dryly. "Thou needst not put on the airs of a——"

But never were Will's words to reach the light of the world. The beggar opened the bag and flung full two pecks of meal into the eyes of his opponents. The high wind aided him in his trick, and full of success it was, for Will Scarlet and Friar Tuck moaned with pain, rubbing their closed eyes with their knuckles. Powerless they stood listening to the mocking laughter of the runaway, fainter and fainter as he put the hilltop between them.

"Oh, death!" sobbed the friar. "There is nary a charm for meal in the eyes."

"Robin, Robin," Scarlet shouted, for he had faith that his master would come to the rescue in spite of his injuries.

Then the two blinded ones heard footsteps approaching and a voice crying in surprise, "What is this? Faith,

what a plight! As meal is my business, perhaps I can be of aid."

Gentle hands brushed the two outlaws, and soon they were able to open their red and swollen eyes. They saw before them the miller of Nottingham, a tall ruddy man, pleasant in disposition and well liked by all the surrounding country.

Will Scarlet told him of their adventure, saying that they must go at once to the fallen man who lay injured

by the roadside a little beyond the hill.

The miller listened to their story thoughtfully and slowly shook his head as he said: "It must have been none other than he. Faith and bodikins but he will be whipped."

"What art thou saying?" asked the friar.

"Nothing," sighed the miller. "Let us go to the aid of thy comrade."

They found the outlaw chief, pale and weak, sitting under a tree holding a bursting head. The miller bathed it tenderly with water from a creek near by, and soon Robin could speak once more.

"Didst thou avenge me, brethren?" he smiled weakly.

Then it was that the friar and Will Scarlet hung their heads in shame, and the miller covered his mouth with his hand to hide the smile upon his lips.

Blurting out the story with each other's aid and interruption, Scarlet and Friar Tuck begged their master's forgiveness.

"Fie, we are shamed forevermore," said Robin Hood sternly, but his eyes were laughing, and soon his hand touched the shoulder of Will and he said gayly, "We do not fight well as squires. Let us not use again a disguise of those we hate. We shall do well to wear our Lincoln green alway."

"Lincoln green!" cried the miller, as pale as the flour he made all day. "Art thou then a part of the band of Robin Hood?"

"Robin Hood is my name, but why dost thou change color? From aught I have heard of thee, miller, we should be great friends. If we together can but catch that villainous beggar, nothing on earth can part us."

"Oh, good Master," moaned the miller, "fate hath stirred a strange mixture this day. That villainous beggar was none other than my unruly son, Midge, in disguise, running away from the mill to join one Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, who has been his idol since he was knee-high."

Loud was the laughter of the three outlaws. And the frightened father smiled with joy to see that he had helped matters instead of making them worse for his audacious son.

"Thinkest thou that thy boy will be a good outlaw?" asked Robin Hood.

"Yea, indeed," admitted the father, "but I had no desire for him to leave me. I was chasing the runaway when I came upon your comrades in sore distress."

"Let him stay with us for a while, anyway," smiled Robin Hood. "He hath not only a strong right arm but a ready wit, and should make a most splendid member of our band."

At the mention of his ready wit, Will Scarlet coughed in some confusion, and the friar sprang lightly to his feet, suggesting that they be on their way to Nottingham as night was beginning to fall. Then, while they bade the father farewell and thanked him for his aid, forth from the thicket came Midge, awkward and blushing. His head hung loosely on his thin neck, his long arms dangled, his hands seemed a mile from his coat sleeves. Mumbling a desire for forgiveness, he knelt at Robin Hood's feet and tried to poise himself in knightly style. But just as he regained his dignity, Friar Tuck pushed him lightly on the shoulder and the great awkward fellow sprawled flat upon his back, gazing with round shy eyes at the audience of laughing elders.

"Thou art dubbed an outlaw," Robin Hood laughed, and in smiling confusion Midge arose to be clapped heartily and heavily upon his back in honor of joining the band. And bidding farewell to the miller, Robin Hood and his three comrades continued their way toward Nottingham to the manor of Roger de Lacy, who could tell them much they wished to know.

Book the third



PRANKS OF THE MERRY MEN

ROGER DE LACY ENTERTAINS A STRANGER

Robin, Will Scarlet, and the friar reached the outskirts of Nottingham. Night had fallen and the lights from the town, like reflected stars, sent golden beams into the darkness. Nottingham Castle was a blaze of glory. Days and nights of festivity attended the presence of

Earl John in his castle at Nottingham.

"A new plan hath occurred to me," Robin Hood said thoughtfully. "Methinks it would be well for me to wear a complete disguise, even from De Lacy himself, that none may ever suspect him of communicating with the outlaw Robin Hood. Thou knowest that an esquire during his long novitiate before he hath attained the rank of knight frequently is obliged to journey through foreign countries as well as his own in the character of an ordinary traveler, that by constant intercourse in many places with distinguished nobles and high-born ladies he may acquire a more thorough knowledge of military works and an intimate acquaintance with all the elegant refinements of courtesy."

"Master, thou surely dost not intend to go alone to the manor of Roger de Lacy," Will cried. "True, if thou art accepted as an esquire, no one will pay over attention to thee, and yet thou wilt be invited to all the festivities given by the nobles of the village." "Why should I not be accepted as one, dear Will? Hast thou forgotten my life in France, where the accent of that foreign country could not but touch my speech whether I willed it or not? Remember, coz, my long years of wandering, and some day I will tell thee of the teaching and influence of the good John of Salisbury, the bishop of Chartres and close friend of Thomas à Becket. Nay, there is little danger. I shall knock late this night at thy friend's door, saying that I am one Brian de Furneaux, attacked on my way from York to London by a rude band of fellows in Lincoln green and desirous of resting a day or two before continuing my journey."

"But Master, I all but forgot. The sheriff may be near thee, and should he recognize thee, naught but

death could be thy punishment."

"The sheriff knows me only in Lincoln green or in Sherwood Forest. He will think naught of a novice esquire in the character of a pursuivant-at-arms stopping over at one of the lesser manors in Nottingham, if that esquire observes the codes of honor and virtue and acteth his part well. Now, go thee Will, dear coz, with the friar and Midge, back into Sherwood, whence I shall return in forty-eight hours or so, after I have glimpsed and spoken with our enemy."

In the darkness the comrades parted. Heavy were the hearts of those who turned toward Sherwood.

"Bodikins, we have had enough of danger this day," sighed Friar Tuck. "If Little John were only with our master to guard him!"

"Nay, Little John would do no good," said Will sadly. "When the master hath set his mind upon a certain plan there is no changing him."

Midge, the miller's son, was shy and silent. He stole quick glances at the friar from time to time, marveling at his breadth and wondering how such a man had become an outlaw.

"Thou thinkest I am not a good outlaw!" cried the friar accusingly, as he surprised the boy staring at him.

"Nay, nay, indeed nay," said the boy in confusion.

"Stop neighing like a horse," shouted the friar crossly.

But before the three had reached Sherwood they were fast friends, and Midge was in danger of thinking the dainty Will almost as handsome as the outlaw chief. The boy trembled when he remembered how he had rained blows on him who was to be his master, but, smiling happily, he thanked the good God above that his dream had come true, that he could serve his hero, Robin Hood.

* * *

Robin Hood, pale and weary from his combat with Midge, did not have to assume a mask of pain when he knocked at the portal of Roger de Lacy. When the great oaken door was opened by a young page, Robin Hood saw within the brightly lighted room the debonair and graceful figure of Will Scarlet's friend in close conversation with other notables of the county, many of whom he knew by sight: Hugh, Bishop of Coventry; Adam, Abbot of Welbeck; Aldred, Prior of Newstead; Alexander, Prior of Lenton; Master Benedict; Serlo, the town clerk, and many others.

"Messires," Robin Hood bowed his head humbly, "I have come many weary miles this day, and not far from your village my palfrey was taken and I was rudely

attacked by a band of fellows all dressed in green. May I, perchance, beg hospitality from ye this night?"

The barons and nobles gathered round him, plying him with questions, and soon he had satisfied them as to what he was, an esquire traveling the country until he had fulfilled all that the rank of knighthood demanded of him. As this was of interest to all of them, they soon made him easy, bringing him wine and bread and offering him garments as courtly as the torn and dust-covered ones he now wore. Only Will's friend, the handsome Roger de Lacy, seemed unimpressed by the stranger's plight. He laughed to himself every time the band of fellows in Lincoln green was mentioned, and when his laughter became noticeable, he answered his guests' questioning eyes with naught but a lazy shrug of his broad shoulders.

"My name is Brian de Furneaux," Robin Hood said to them, "and I have been in so many princely courts and manors and castles all my life since my good mother enlisted me to be a knight, I scarce know where to say I have come from. Let us say—Normandy. That, I take it, is a safe enough place to mention in this gathering."

They laughed loudly at his clever words, and Roger de

Lacy clapped his hands, saying:

"Verily, thou readest the gathering well, for such a party of Normans does not exist in all England as is found in our little town of Nottingham. I'faith, I swear thee, I am the only one who will speak a kind word to a fellow with golden hair. And by thy blue eyes, friend, I would not be at all surprised should thine own hair be that color beneath the cap thou wearest."

Robin took the cap from his head, and certainly the silken curls that fell to his shoulders were like spun gold. A murmur of suspicion seemed to pass over the onlookers. Only Roger de Lacy laughed, the drawling, lilting laugh that Robin Hood had learned already to listen for.

"Luck be with thee that this is not a century ago," the host said lazily. "Then fellows with golden hair were quartered, hanged upon the pillory, or if a daintier form of torture was desired, hot eggs might be placed beneath the arm-pits, lighted candles tied to the fingers that they might be consumed with the wax, or the thumb squeezed in a screw until it popped like a ripe plum. I'faith, I know several more kinds of torture, friends, should ye choose to try them on our guest."

Then those who had drawn away from Robin Hood turned courteously to him once again, for their host, Roger de Lacy, had reminded them that the invasion was over and that a Saxon knight with golden hair was just as welcome in their midst as a dark-haired Frenchman if he himself showed no bitterness. Robin Hood bowed his head in thanks for his host's kindliness and said simply: "I'faith, my dear mother was a Saxon lady, but happily enough, as my surname telleth thee, she married a Norman as loyal as any in Nottingham. And now if it please thee," he continued, "I shall retire that I may not intrude upon thee any further, and I shall continue my journey toward London at break of day that I may be no further burden upon thee."

"But not in such a hurry, stranger," Roger smiled.
"To be a knight of true rank thou must first have seen the castle of Nottingham, for it is as near to the court of England as any in the country. Perhaps thou dost not

know that Earl John is to be part ruler of the land while his brother is away at the Crusades, and John, I am willing to wager, will hold a court in Nottingham as often as in London town. At least, he has friends who will urge him to that line of action," added the laughing De Lacy.

"Yea, I have heard of Nottingham," Robin Hood returned. "Is there not a man of rank and power here

called Sir Guy of Gisborne?"

"Aye, thou hast heard correctly. The power of Sir Guy is no myth. He sweats blood and fire to hold the reins, and, I fear me, he holds them."

"The reins—thou speakest in figure, no doubt—

but what doth this man drive?"

"Some may say the nation," answered De Lacy indifferently. "He driveth me mad, and that is enough for my consideration."

At this outburst several of those present moved toward the door, distinctly shocked at the blasphemy directed

at their local power.

"Come to Nottingham Castle, De Furneaux. Earl John himself is there this evening and a banquet for all the select men of Nottingham and the surrounding country will be served at midnight. I can promise thee a fair face or two to look upon, and if it is agreeable to thee, thou canst do aught thou wishest save actually fighting in tomorrow's tournament, for that, as thou knowest, is forbidden thee until thou hast become a knight."

Robin Hood could have shouted for joy at this playing into his very hands, but he continued to play the part of a young esquire, studiously intent upon carrying out

his words and deeds as befitted one desirous of attaining knighthood. He longed to speak to Roger de Lacy on the subject nearest his heart, namely, the power of Sir Guy of Gisborne and what harm it might have upon all England were it unchained; but it would be folly to suppose that this young noble's sympathy was with the Saxons merely because he said a kind word for them. Far better would it be this night to pretend he loved the Normans.

Nottingham Castle was planned like all castles of the time. Roger de Lacy and his guest, Brian de Furneaux, entered first the ante-hall that led into a great reception room where they were received by the count of the palace, who saw that they were acceptable as the Earl's guests. The walls were of whitened stone, ornamented with roses and leaves cut in the mortar and colored with distemper. Hanging on pillars and all about the walls of the rooms were pennants and emblazoned standards. Finely woven tapestries pictured pleasant groves with cattle, sheep, and the figures that dot the scenery of the farmlands, and some told the stories of old romances and portraved heroes of ancient history. such as Charlemagne, Ulysses, Tristam, and Iseult. The floors were of stone and enameled tiles, and were covered with scented herbs and straw.

Robin Hood saw not the glory of the castle. His eyes were fastened upon Earl John, graceful and arrogant, turning often to the tall, spare figure beside him, a man with a monkish face, pasty white, with black hair fitting closely his long, egg-shaped head.

"Ah," smiled De Lacy, "I see that thou hast picked him out of the multitudes, the watchdog of the kingdom." "So that is Sir Guy of Gisborne," was the young esquire's only answer, for he trusted not his tongue. How he longed to say to the courageous man beside him who spoke aloud as no other Norman in Nottingham would have dared, something that would bind the two together as friends. But he needs must continue his pose of the shy and tactful stranger.

"There is a pretty sight," his host said.

And here indeed was another matter, one upon which the young esquire could express himself without fear of discovery. For there, close beside them in the great reception hall, stood a laughing group of maidens clustered about one, marvelously beautiful, compelling in a lovely domineering way, and gayer than all the others, for she it was who caused their gayety.

"By the sweet Virgin, who can she be?" Robin Hood whispered. "I'faith, she must be ruler of the Court of Love itself. Look thou at her noble bearing as well as at her lovely face. Look at the intelligence in her eyes as well as at her glance that sears one like the touch of fire."

"Well, verily, stranger, thou hast indeed spoken prettily. I like the rhythm of thy words, but sing not to the tune of that fair lady any longer. There are too many striking the same note."

"Is there no one who will tell me who she is?" cried

Robin Hood impetuously.

"There is no one else but me," smiled his host. "The lady whose slender body sways hither and you and back again, in ceaseless melody of movement like a flower kissing the wind—she whose hair combines the Norman ebony and Saxon gold into a flaming bronze—whose

eyes are gray as the sweeping sea that lies between our land and France—"

"But all of that I know," interrupted Robin Hood. "Her name, her name, I plead with thee."

"Marian Fitzwalter, whose father leaves this day to join King Richard on his great crusade. Maid Marian, the dainty morsel that falls into the watchdog's care, she who will become the ward of Sir Guy of Gisborne, standing yonder at Earl John's heels."

Robin Hood was stunned into silence. This lovely creature—the impish child who had ridden his shoulder not so many years ago. Of course, maidens shot up suddenly, blossomed overnight into mysterious and feminine wonder, he had been told. But he could not have believed it to be true. And now instead of desiring to meet the winsome beauty the outlaw chief wished to withdraw from her, yet to linger forever near the magic of her person, guarding her, keeping her from danger, treasuring the memory of the child that rode on his shoulder rather than that of the dainty Lady Fitzwalter who would cringe from the touch of a rude outlaw.

Then the reverie of Robin Hood was broken by the good-natured laughter of De Lacy, who whispered to him:

"Enough, friend, of thy staring. She will be aware of thee, and none can look more arrogant than she if it should be her will. Into the dining hall, De Furneaux. Earl John leads the way. Perchance thou shalt be near the maiden. Patience be with thee." But when they reached the massive dining hall, Robin Hood found that two columns divided the room into three parts, and in one part sat the royal family; Earl John and the dignified Eleanor of Aquitaine, wife of the dead Henry. She

had been the toast of two generations, the celebrated woman who had once presided over the romantic Court of Love, once Queen of France, later of England, and now the regent in the absence of Richard, her son. royal family had gathered the chosen guests around its table: Sir Guy of Gisborne, bowing and suavely agreeable: Lord Hugh Fitzwalter, dreamy and sad; the lovely Maid Marian, daughter of Lord Hugh; and a thin, sickly youth whom De Lacy whispered was Geoffrey, the son of Sir Guy. There were others that Robin Hood knew not nor cared to know, for his eves were never to leave the little drama of those lives belonging to the personages just named. He saw the momentary terror in John's eyes when Eleanor of Aquitaine turned her proud profile to the wheedling Sir Guy. He saw the lovesick Geoffrey cringe under the snapping fires of the Lady Fitzwalter's words. A strange group, indeed, at cross purposes, at sword's points beneath the gloved surfaces.

The second part of the dining hall was given over to the officers of the household: the chancellor who verified, sealed, and dispatched all royal decrees and orders; the count of the palace, who surveyed the guests; the mayor of the palace, who turned it into a veritable monument of politics; the arch-chaplain, who read the prayers; the lord of the bed-chamber; count of the stables; and the few ladies in waiting, tittering behind their fans in sheer nervousness. The third and largest division was for the guests who, during the banquet at one time or another, sat at the Earl's table or drank to his health.

Robin Hood scarcely noticed the marvelous banquet, so excited was he and impatient to hear something of what was being said at the royal table. But De Lacy soon quieted him by telling him that as there were so many guests, no one would go to the Earl's table that night, but would all drink his health later.

"They say that good Lord Hugh is to speak a farewell before he leaves," whispered De Lacy. "But tarry, stranger, on these marvelous dishes, and carry them in thy body instead of these thoughts in thy mind that seem to worry thee. If it is the fair Maid Marian that hath turned thee love-sick, I will see that thou meetest with her."

Then Robin Hood saw that if he did not meet his host's kindnesses with grace, he would be doing a double wrong. He would be playing very badly his part of the young esquire visiting Nottingham for the first time, for such a person would be alive with interest and curiosity at all he saw. And, secondly, he would be discourteous to the charming Roger de Lacy who had brought him here so gladly. So he turned his attention to the delicacies placed before him, and the conversation during the entire banquet was of food and of cooking, and Roger de Lacy proved a veritable dictionary and cyclopaedia in answer to the outlaw's questions.

To begin with, there was a half a pint of Grenache and roast apples with white sugarplums soaked in the syrup of figs, sorrel, watercress, and rosemary. Then came the soup that contained, they were told, trouts, eels, herring, almonds, and ginger. There were fresh soles and salmon, pike and carp; capons with white sauce ornamented with pieces of scarlet pomegranate; for roast, a roe-deer, gosling with a sauce of orange and cameline. For side-dishes they had jellies of crayfish, young rabbits, and pork. And for dessert, oranges, apples, rice, and

fried almonds or stewed fruits, and finally a marvelous list of delicacies and wines: dried apricots from Armenia, pistachio nuts and plums from Syria, peaches from Persia, cherries from Cerasus, filberts from the Hellespont, chestnuts from Castana (a town of Magnesia), almonds from Asia, pomegranates from Africa, quinces from Cydonia in Crete, and figs, pears, and apples from Greece. The wines were like bottled sunshine and crushed raspberries: Mâcon, Cahors, Rheims, Choisy, Montargis, Marne, Orléanais.

Then when the minstrels had sung and the jongleurs performed their gymnastic tumbling, Earl John arose, and they all drank to the health of his mother, whom he presented as the regent of England, and afterward to the true king, Richard the Lion-Hearted, who had gone to join Philip of France that they might set forth together on the crusade. Then the people saw the dignified and bent figure of Lord Hugh come forward and they were silent, for all Nottingham had come to love this man for his quiet humor and deep religious faith. Besides, was he not the father of the loveliest lady in England? For from the highest noble to the lowliest serf, Maid Marian had won a capricious love.

"Lord Hugh bids thee goodby," said Earl John. "He bears messages of good-will from myself to Philip Augustus of France and to my brother Richard, and he standeth for the little village of Nottingham in the war against the Saracens. Lord Fitzwalter liveth in the past, with Peter the Hermit whose burning zeal made him known as the apostle of the Crusades. May God watch over these brave men who a century later have caught the ardor of those first crusaders."

"I bid thee farewell," Lord Hugh said simply. "I leave to thee a part of me in my little daughter, Maid Marian."

Maid Marian's lovely eyes were filled with tears, and she looked for a moment like a frightened, wistful child left alone in a country of intrigue and darkness, instead of a courageous young woman sending her father off to his heart's desire.

"Thou, Sir Guy, my neighbor, must take Marian to be thy ward while I am gone. Guard her and keep her for me should I return. And good people of Nottingham, while you bow before His Majesty, Earl John, I feel my heart crying to me to go with his brother, the true majesty, King Richard."

"Long live the King," the people shouted, and they looked a little shamefaced because they had almost forgotten him in the presence of the brother who took his place.

"I wish to leave a message for my daughter—my baby, I please to call her. And to make a little mystery, good people of Nottingham, and to safeguard her future, I wish to tell the message to one of ye tonight, unknown to all the others. I trust him to keep my words safe, a sacred trust to be delivered to Lady Marian should I not return."

A solemn note had been struck. A mist seemed to fall about the guests. They looked at one another without seeing. They spoke to one another polite words that were not heard. They saw the good face of Lord Hugh, and secretly searched their neighbors, even the King's brother, Earl John, and found not his saintliness reflected. A doubt had arisen in every heart. Doubt

of what? Mystery of what? Fear of what? None could have answered, but a prophetic gloom settled over them. It was Maid Marian who broke the stillness. Laughing a little tremulously, she cried:

"Your Majesty, if my father whispers his message to you, I hope that you will straightway tell me in turn.

I have a lady's curiosity."

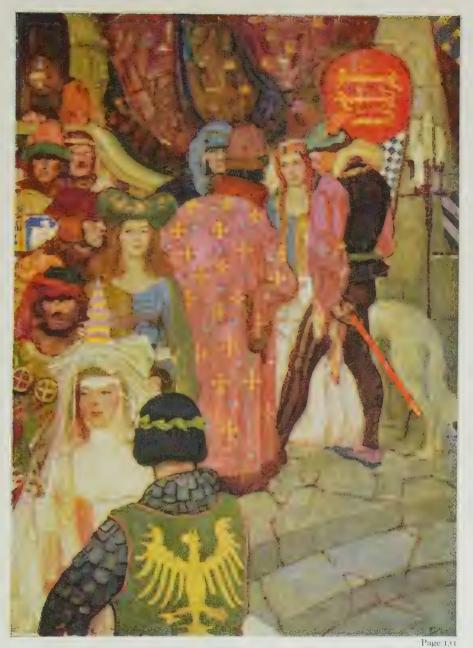
Smiling, the regent, Queen Eleanor, arose and led the party into the vast reception hall where music played, and soon groups of courtly men and lovely ladies joined hands in circles, moving to the rhythm of the tunes in graceful dances.

Robin Hood forgot his seriousness even as the others threw off their mood of wonder, and soon he and the popular Roger de Lacy were surrounded with fair ladies, each outspeaking the other in coquetry and art.

"Pay little attention to the boy," teased De Lacy. "He is but an esquire, not yet versed enough to be a

knight."

"I'faith, I have traveled too much ever to have stopped to be a knight," retorted Robin Hood. "I have done all the sorry tasks required of me—turned somersaults in a coat of mail to accustom myself to the weight of armor, yet never have I felt the joy of battle; danced vigorously in a shirt and helmet of steel that I might know the skill of dueling, yet never a chance have I ever had to duel. I have vaulted over a charger, but have never been given aught but a slow palfrey to ride upon, and I have climbed, by the mere pressure of mine arms and legs between two perpendicular walls that stood four or five feet asunder, reaching the tower and descending without rest. And after all these tiring exercises, no fair



Into the midst of this pleasant chatting sauntered the youth Geoffrey



lady hath fluttered near me on my return, while if I were a knight, I'd have them crooning over me, unbuckling mine armor with their own lovely hands, spraying me with sweet perfumes, and adorning me with a scarf that they have themselves embroidered. See, ladies of Nottingham, I wear no scarf or talisman—only a jerkin loaned me by your good De Lacy. He kept his embroidery to himself."

All this was said so sadly and forlornly that the ladies could not keep from laughter, and each one tried to win a smile from the handsome stranger.

"Thou makest me jealous," stormed De Lacy in mock anger. "Every lady looketh at thee because thou art new to her. I'll wager if they really knew thee, they would all run and hide."

"Perchance thou art right," smiled the young esquire. "Who can tell who I may be—King Richard himself."

"Fie, thou art proud of thyself," said Maid Marian haughtily. "The good King hath not blue eyes."

"Whoever he may be," smiled De Lacy, lifting his dainty hand to his lips to hide a yawn that told of his boredom at the conversation, "he came in the night and leaveth at the beginning of another nightfall. He will be gone from us like any Robin Hood."

"How meanest thou that, 'like any Robin Hood,'"

asked the young esquire, frankly puzzled.

"Tush, squire," Maid Marian said impatiently. "Indeed thou must be a stranger in England. Knowest thou, then, so little of the words of Englishmen that this saying perplexes you? It is as if Roger de Lacy had said, 'like a shadow before the sun', or 'like an arrow from its singing cord.' He is a tricky bird, that Robin."

"Why, what knowest thou of him, Lady Fitzwalter?" the stranger questioned impudently.

For a moment she flushed, then with a pretty toss of

her head she answered:

"Enough! Nights when I cannot sleep, I hear him kittering with elves and fairy-folk in the least frequented corners of my father's manor. He convents with brownies beneath stacks of wood and frisks with puck and hobgoblin in the buttery on moonless nights. He is son to a mortal woman and to Oberon, king of fairy-land. His real name is Robin Goodfellow and he rides on a bat when the wind is moaning. And, hast thou never heard how once when I was young he slipped past the guards of Sir Guy of Gisborne's household and startled everyone?"

"Thou hast not told all," smiled De Lacy.

"Oh," she flushed again shyly. "You see, stranger, on that last-named occasion I rode upon his shoulder."

"Thou didst ride upon his shoulder!" cried Brian de Furneaux. "Then he appeareth in the shape of a man. Old and weazened as a holy palmer fresh back from the paynim in Palestine, I'll wager, if thou rodest upon his shoulder. Thou seemest, at least, to be disdainful of all younger men."

"I was but a child," Maid Marian cried angrily. "Ho! that sounds indeed like the lying tale of some scurvy minstrel. He is not old. My Robin Goodfellow is as straight as a young ash and fair as the break of dawn, gay as springtime, true as the bell that summons us to mass, and chaste, hark ye, as any Galahad."

"But how canst thou speak so surely?" the stranger, Brian de Furneaux, teased.

"I can't," the lovely Marian said wistfully, "for he kept his face well hidden, though I peeked beneath his hood to see. But all this Dame Softly, my nurse who knoweth everything there is to know, I feel quite certain, hath sworn to me with the psalter at her lips."

Into the midst of this pleasant chatting sauntered the sickly youth, Geoffrey, and Maid Marian, after a haughty look of disdain, lifted her skirts and moved away. Robin Hood looked after her tenderly. How young her dream of him! How sweet the memory she cherished! Closing his eyes, he captured the vision of a great cathedral in France and the elusive wonder of a Virgin's face, his dream, his memory.

A low whisper broke his reverie. He turned half impatiently, expecting the faun-like face of the gay De Lacy. Instead he looked into the kind eyes of Lord Fitzwalter.

"Stranger," the old man said, "I have chosen thee to keep my daughter's message."

"But why me?" the startled Robin Hood cried. "Wouldst thou give so grave a secret into the keeping of one thou knowest not?"

"There are none whom I may surely trust in Nottingham, and thou hast come from far away. Thou hast a brave countenance and there is a look in thine eyes that doth not match thy youth. It belongeth to the ages, to one whose years have been no gentle play. Wherever thou art on thy travels, keep in touch with the fate of Richard and those who went with him on the pilgrimage. If aught happen that His Majesty should not return, it meaneth that those with him will have perished. Then, sire, come thou straightway to Nottingham, and

say this to my baby: 'I lie with Iseult's dust 'neath Shrovetide yew.'"

"I promise thee that wherever I may be, the message shall be brought to Lady Fitzwalter should aught happen to Richard and to thee," said Robin Hood seriously, his heart filled with wonder and joy that the sacred trust had been given into safe hands.

Then the two looked understandingly at each other, the one with Norman blood in his veins, the other the sturdiest of Saxons, and it was like the blending of rain and sun into a bow of glory, a promise of a future nation born of these two.

WILL SCARLET SAVES A LADY

Robin Hood awoke after a night of troubled dreams. The one small window in the bedchamber at the top of Roger de Lacy's manor was covered with a piece of thin horn, and the outlaw's head was heavy with the stuffiness of the room. He would be glad to return at nightfall to Sherwood Forest where he could sleep under the bright stars, with the cool wind blowing on his hot cheeks.

Roger de Lacy viewed his guest from under drooping eyelids. He yawned lazily and sighed, "Good morning, De Furneaux. I like not the first hours of the day. The sun taketh the glamor from my surroundings and I feel myself settling into bachelorhood and growing a gray hair or two."

"Yea, old thou lookest! Soon thou shalt wear a cap and sit all day by the fire growing ancient and full of

creaking bones," laughed Robin Hood.

"I'faith, it looketh as if most men in Nottingham will go to the grave single," De Lacy continued morbidly. "That lovely lass that thou didst meet with last evening hath cast a spell upon our hearts. My dreams are full of her and my waking hours are but bridges till I sleep and dream of her again."

"Hath she given thee any encouragement, friend?"

asked Robin Hood sympathetically.

"Nay, nay, none of us. She holdeth up to us an impossible ideal. Strange indeed the illusion this maiden hath about the outlaw, Robin Hood. You heard her

speak of him last night, a fair torrent of praise—chaste as Galahad, joyous as spring. By the good St. Dunstan, I wonder if he can be! From all I have heard, I would suppose him to be a rough fellow, a Saxon of course, for his mission seemeth to be to make life a stumbling block for all who are Norman."

"It is a maiden's way to have a dream hidden in her heart. Some day she may meet this Robin Hood, and

no doubt a sorry disappointment awaits her."

"Then what will she do?" said the doleful De Lacy. "Die of a broken heart, I'll wager; or worse, cover her burnished curls with a nun's veil. Heaven! If she would but take me seriously. She doth hold her slender sides and laugh at me, and my spine hath fair wriggled 'neath her looks of scorn at my attempted wit."

"Faith! Be cheerful," smiled Robin Hood. "The day will come when the lady will change her mind, as ladies will, and who knows? She may even deign to

look at thee."

"A curse upon thy impudence," moaned De Lacy. "If it were not daylight, I would charge thee to a duel, but I fight not in the sunshine. I can see mine enemy too well, and the awkward positions he taketh send me into laughter, and nothing weakens the strength like a giggle."

"Art thou entering the tournament this day?" asked Robin Hood.

"Nay, by the risen One, it is an unworthy tournament. It casteth a blot upon Earl John, according to my way of thinking, though many of the people in Nottingham will clap their hands for him."

"What meanest thou?"

"Why, the prize for valor hath been chosen."

"I still am in darkness," said the outlaw. "What

wrong lieth in the offering of a prize?"

"Thou art indeed a stubborn fellow," sighed De Lacy wearily. "I see that I must exert my indolent self and tell thee the story. The proud prince of Aragon is here in England. Today he passeth through Nottingham with his guard, two veritable giants who have challenged any knight in the land to enter the lists with them. To give zest to the tournament, Earl John hath offered a lovely Jewess as a prize for the Moorish prince, should his guard succeed in vanquishing all who contend with them. On the other hand, should any knight from the surrounding countryside kill or wound first one giant, then the other, the young Jewess is his prize, to free or hold a captive bird, depending on the gentleman's honor."

"A sad fate indeed," said Robin Hood sternly. "A maiden of that strangely oppressed race hath little chance for happiness in this day. If I could but enter the lists—but I am not yet a knight! And thou, wilt thou not

attempt to defend her happiness?"

"I should be unhorsed at the very beginning," said Roger de Lacy gloomily. "I tell thee since the fair Maid Marian hath given me so little encouragement, I have become but a pretense at being a man. My blood is weak as water, and my indolent body shivers at the thought of exerting itself. If I had any chance of aiding the lovely Jewess I would gladly give my life for her, for little good my life doth on this earth anyhow."

"Come, such sorry words do not become thee, De Lacy. I like thee best with lazy laughter on thy lips and the audacity touching thy words that I have so far marveled upon. Thou art an individual, and not a puppet dancing to the desires of certain powers of

Nottingham."

"Well, thou cheerest me," smiled De Lacy. "I seem not such a bad fellow after all. Let us prepare to go to the tournament. We may sit for a while with Lady Fitzwalter, for her father has gone to London this early dawn, and she will be unaccompanied."

"The sickly Geoffrey will be there, I'll wager."

"Yes, that is certain, but not for long will he keep his eyes upon her loveliness. She will send him tripping down her steps into the box of his pasty-faced father. We must watch for that opportunity to slip in with her, though Heaven knoweth every other young fellow in Nottingham will be watching with us."

The two young men set out for the lists, passing along the streets of Nottingham where banners hung from manor windows and coats of arms were affixed to the outer walls of the church and castle. A herald led the ladies who were to attend the tournament past the armorial banners, pointing to each and naming its owner. If the lady recognized any knight against whom she had a complaint, she touched his banner or shield and he was not allowed to enter the lists that day.

Reaching the lists, a circular piece of ground, Robin Hood saw a sight that never failed to thrill him. The sides were gilded, painted with emblems and heraldic devices, and ornamented with hangings and tapestries as rich as those that had hung on the castle walls. At the ends of the lists were stands, roofed and closed in, built in tower shape and divided into boxes magnificently

decorated with pennants, shields, and arms. Stationed in the stands were distinguished princes, dames and demoiselles of the countryside, the older knights who could no longer enter the tournament, and the judges of the combat. Standing about on the grounds at certain posts were camp marshal and the second of the knights, whose duty it was to give assistance to all who might require it. The kings-at-arms, the heralds, and the pursuivants-at-arms stood within the arena and were expected to observe closely the combatants, faithfully reporting each blow dealt. Varlets and sergeants stood ready to pick up and replace broken weapons, help unhorsed knights from the lists, and help with the duty of keeping order.

While music filled the onlookers with an added exultation, the ladies entered the lists to the clarion call of the bugles, leading in the knights by golden or silver chains. Each combatant wore either a veil, a scarf, headdress, mantle, bracelet, or even plain bow of ribbon, a favor from his lady which he carried throughout the tournament on his shield, lance, or helmet so that she might recognize him in the clashing mêlée of horsemen.

Robin Hood's heart beat impatiently, his blood pounded in his veins, he could scarce contain himself, so eager was he to enter the tournament grounds. But he had chosen the disguise, unhappily, of a squire instead of a knight, fearing that more attention would be paid him if he pretended this higher rank, and now he was suffering punishment for his carefulness. He saw the old knights in the boxes, impatient like himself, rearing like reined horses, their eyes bright with unshed tears of disappointment. He heard the voice of one, crying:

"Recollect whose son thou art! Be worthy of thine ancestry!" and saw a young knight smile radiantly in return, his eyes alight with the glory of one who bears the emblems of the past.

Then a silence fell over the crowd, for Earl John had entered his magnificent central box and close beside him was the dark-skinned Moor, the Prince of Aragon, his white teeth gleaming cruelly at the spectacle before him. And into the judges' box came the tall, well-known figure of Sir Guy of Gisborne, holding by the hand the shrinking young Jewess. They pushed her to the front of the box, where she stood unprotected from the thousands of eyes. Her long black hair framed her oval face and hung in heavy braids against the soft yellow silk of her gown. Her great dark eyes were filled with the pain of her people. Her ivory skin made her seem like a lovely phantom beside the rosy-cheeked demoiselles of England. She swayed a little and lifted her tragic face to heaven as if in passionate entreaty against her oppression.

But the people turned away from her, for they liked not to look upon her fragile body. And as the music swelled louder and louder the two giant-like Moors came into the lists, such perfect horsemen as none had ever seen, sitting as if they had been molded by one hand, horse and rider together, dark chargers standing statuelike awaiting a signal for action from their dark masters.

With marvelous rapidity the knights of England were unhorsed, their weapons broken, death inflicted by the dark strangers. And the Prince of Aragon hurled quantities of small coins amongst the crowd in lavish generosity at his success. "Largesse" and "noël" the people cried joyously as they pocketed his gold, but no

words passed the sternly set lips of Roger de Lacy, for once aroused from his customary indifference. And no sound did Robin Hood utter as he saw one after another of the knights retreat from the tilt, and the last look of hope die from the eyes of the child of ivory who stood in the judges' stand.

An abrupt movement betrayed Robin Hood's surprise. "What is it?" said De Lacy irritably. "Thou didst startle me. Dost thou perchance recognize the last knight to take his stand? He weareth the coat-of-arms of the Gamwells, well-known Saxons from Maxwell town. By the looks of his delicate form he will be smashed asunder in a trice. He is my friend Will Gamwell. Methought he was in hiding in Sherwood Forest for the killing of his father's steward. But perchance the cloud over him has blown away and he has returned to Maxwell town."

"Nay, I did not recognize him," said Robin Hood carelessly. "I too was but struck by his slimness and felt sorry to see so dainty a fellow try his hand futilely against the giants yonder."

A shout of amazement filled the air. The slim knight who had last entered the lists had whirled his falchion about with a keen, sharp movement and run one of the infidels through. The amazement of the crowd was echoed by the dying scream of the horseman, who fell to the ground with blood and blasphemy pouring from his mouth.

"The devil cannot break his fast unless he have ye both," cried the slender knight.

Now every person near the lists was trembling with excitement. The little Jewess had hidden her white

face in her pale, delicate hands, in an agony of terror

and uncertainty.

Robin Hood's eyes searched the crowd for Maid Marian and saw her with hands clenched on the railing of her box, leaning half out of it, flushed cheeks and bright eves showing him the emotion she felt. For one jealous moment how he longed to be the slender knight enjoying

so glorious a victory!

Then came the clash between the remaining combatant of the Prince of Aragon's guard and the young hero. The trumpets sounded the charge that was like the meeting of two thunder clouds. Both horses staggered, both riders seemed to lean backward, but only one fell to the ground. To the increased wonder of the people of Nottingham, the knight of their land had succeeded in unhorsing and wounding the second dark fighter of another world, although each of the strangers looked twice his size and had manifested almost supernatural strength.

"Who is this man?" Earl John cried, pleased with the

victory.

"My son, my only son," cried a tall man with irongray locks falling over his courtly garments.

"And who mayst thou be?" said Sir Guy of Gisborne

haughtily.

"Methought thou knewest me well," the tall man replied coldly. "I am the lord of Maxwell town. My name is Gamwell, and this young blood that hath so nobly fought you tournament is Will, my son, who had to flee from Maxwell because he killed my servant, a tricky Norman whom I have good reason to think was put there to spy upon me."

"Let the matter be," said Earl John impatiently. "Sir Guy, cross that particular grudge off thy books, should it be one that has a penalty attached."

Then the young knight knelt gracefully before His Highness and thanked him for his words, and turning to

his father he embraced him tenderly.

"Father," the people near him heard him say, "do not ask me to return to Maxwell at once. I will take myself hither in a few days and tell thee of my wanderings and of a wondrous new life that has opened up before me."

Robin Hood, who had made his way through the crowd until he stood near the young knight, added his praises to those of the others who crowded about the hero.

"Fair stranger," the outlaw chief said, "scarlet is for valor, as white standeth for purity. Thou shouldst take the name Will Scarlet to befit thy actions."

"Hush, hush, thou fool," whispered De Lacy.

"What have I said?" asked the esquire, Brian de Furneaux.

"What hast thou said, indeed?" came the laughing voice of Maid Marian. "Thou hast given him the name of one of Robin Hood's band, a certain Will Scarlet who always dresses like a redstart."

"I'faith, if I have insulted thee, forgive me," Robin

Hood cried meekly to young Gamwell.

"Nay," the hero laughed, "thou hast compared me to a fellow whom I have heard well mentioned. They say he is somewhat of a dandy, but pretty to look upon and very brave."

Then Robin Hood wanted to retort merrily to his comrade, for here was Will Scarlet up to his usual tricks

again, praising his own virtues, and in a position where none could contradict him, for of course none but Robin Hood knew that young Gamwell in complimenting the outlaw Will Scarlet but complimented himself.

The lovely prize of the tournament was brought before the hero, but he gently kissed her hand and bade her go in peace and liberty. The Moorish prince surveyed her lissom form greedily as she ran swiftly through the crowd like a young deer away from the eyes of a hunter. Then Lady Fitzwalter took a bit of scarlet ribbon from her curls and offered it shyly to the brave knight, saying:

"None has ever worn my favor before, Sire. I like the words of the stupid Brian de Furneaux well, even though he spake them without knowing their meaning. Scarlet is for valor, and that other Will Scarlet who dwells in Sherwood Forest hath always been my favorite hero next to Robin Hood himself, so take my ribbon and add it to thy name."

Will Scarlet winked slyly at Robin Hood, who had grown crimson at the maiden's thrust at his stupidity. But he could do naught but watch the fair Will kneel before the lovely lady and accept the bit of scarlet ribbon as his emblem.

"A banquet is prepared. Come, stranger," the Earl said.

But scarce had he spoken when galloping hoofs came into the lists, a host of chargers, and mounted upon them sturdy fellows all clad in Lincoln green. Before their eyes the people of Nottingham saw a strange spectacle. Robin Hood's band galloped into the crowd, sending them into the stalls like frightened cattle, with their

backs turned away from the oncoming host. Then the outlaws wheeled their chargers and galloped back whence they came.

"What meanest this?" Earl John cried, as white as paper.

"Nothing, Your Highness," Sir Guy of Gisborne soothed him, though his knees shook like jelly. "The rogue Robin Hood hath caught us off our guard."

But a low cry had come from Maid Marian, and those who turned to her saw that she held a bit of ribbon pierced with an arrow.

"It was the real Will Scarlet!" she marveled. "He hath given me back my favor, but that was but courteous of him, for the Lady of Fitzwalter does not give emblems to an outlaw."

Instantly Roger de Lacy was by her side, for he saw that her mouth trembled like a hurt child's and her eyes were brimming with tears that she could not hold back.

"Oh, oh," she sobbed as he led her away from the curious people, "I have lowered myself. I have flung my favor at an outlaw who is now laughing at me along with all the other silly sheep of Nottingham."

"Oh, come, I say thee, sweet, it was but an adventure to be forgotten," De Lacy said awkwardly.

"How darest thou call me sweet! Roger de Lacy, thou takest advantage of my grief." Here she sobbed again.

"But, Maid Marian, what grief? I do not understand. I will go and fight that Will Scarlet unto death for so hurting thee."

"Nay—you fight!" she cried indignantly, and then at the look of determination on his indolent face she

smiled a little tremulously, and brushing away her tears she was again the mocking Lady Fitzwalter leading De Lacy a tantalizing chase.

"Where is the stupid young esquire that thou hadst

with thee?" she asked.

"Marry, I had forgotten him! He was so amazed when those fellows in Lincoln green galloped us against

the wall, he probably fainted in terror.

"Nay, he did not look like a coward," said Maid Marian thoughtfully, "but he was so very silly about Robin Hood. Imagine, he knew not who the outlaw was."

"We had best take a look for him," De Lacy said

crossly.

But though they searched in every corner of the lists, and afterward questioned all who had gone to the banquet at Nottingham Castle, no one had seen again the naïve young esquire who had won a smile or two from the demoiselles of Nottingham and a passing kindliness from the charming Roger de Lacv.

Black chargers galloped along a road silvered by moonlight. The stillness was broken only by the sound of the wind whistling against their bodies as they sped along. Silent as statues were their riders, erect on the prancing horses. Suddenly the road left the open meadows and turned into the deep groves of the forest. A horn blew three mournful blasts. A night owl hooted a frightened reply.

"By my faith, Will, what made thee come to the tournament?" a voice said.

"To be near thee, Master. I could not bear to have thee take leave of Nottingham at nightfall unattended."

"It was a clever trick, boy," the first voice answered with a chuckle. "Marry, didst thou see them turn their backs like blinded cattle when the outlaws galloped into the lists?"

"Yea, a good joke," Will murmured happily. "We were both swung on a horse and hidden by the throng in a trice."

"And gone from the lists before they knew we had come," said Robin Hood.

"So thy disguise as the stupid esquire was a success?" said Will.

"Yea," Robin replied ruefully, "I was too much of a success at being stupid."

"And the lovely Maid Marian laughed at thee in scorn. Ah, Master, and thou pretendest not to care what the lady thinks of thee!" teased the merry Will Scarlet, and Robin Hood answered him not, save to give him a gentle slap with the branch he carried in his hand to spur the charger on.

Again there was silence. The hearts of the two outlaws were filled with regret. An adventure ended always saddened them. Life could contain only so many adventures, and another had sped its hour. But with each of them something lingered with the memory. For Will, a torn bit of a scarlet ribbon; for Robin a simple phrase given to him in trust by the father of Lady Fitzwalter.

ROBIN HOOD GOES TO MASS

"Oh, faith," sighed Will Stutely. "Well do I know the look that the master weareth these last few days. He will take us to church e'er long, and heaven help the one of us that carries not a saintly mien."

"But methought he liked not the clergy," said Midge.

"'Tis only the proud ecclesiastics he disdains. The parish priest of St. Mary's church in Nottingham hath his deep respect, I am told," Little John answered.

"Verily, our master will have a hard time to carry me to church," sulked Midge. "I left mine home to be free and to escape such duties as this. It is enough, I tell thee, to go to mass on Palm Sunday, Easter, St. Mark's day, all of Whitsuntide and Michaelmas. To take a fine day in the late summer to travel to Nottingham bespeaks of folly, to my way of thinking."

"Let not our master hear thee speak rebelliously," said Little John sternly, and Midge hung his head in shame.

So it was that Robin Hood came upon them, a half-moon circle of long-legged fellows digging the ground with their toes and chewing thoughtfully upon long grasses and twigs.

"By the good Saint Thomas, what a sorry band ye are! I'faith, I recognize the signs of your illness. Ye have played too long, and the landscape looks singularly dull to your sated appetites. Ye have laughed too much, and now ye are like tired children, your laughter

perilously near to tears. There are times when one must start life over again, measuring its joys out more carefully and changing one's diet from eternal sweets. Such a time has come, brave fellows. Let us travel to Nottingham and say our prayers to Mild Mary. Let us mingle awhile with saint and song and script, and on our return the Vale of Peace in Sherwood Forest will be twice made sweet again."

They did not answer him. They pouted a little, and shrugged their boyish shoulders ungraciously. They liked not his plan to go to mass in Nottingham, but Robin Hood, like a wise father, knew that in their present disposition they would like no plan that he could offer them. He longed to speak lovingly to them, but saw that his words would rub their stubborn thoughts the wrong way, much as the hand rubs the soft fur of a kitten into angry bristles. So he ordered them sternly to make ready to follow him.

"I prithee," said Midge, who had grown penitent quicker than the others, "let us attend thee, Master, for great danger follows thee on a trip into Nottingham."

"Little John will attend me," Robin Hood answered. "Let the rest stay together. If you wish you may start ahead of me, for mine entrance into the church may be less noticed if the attention be centered about all of ye."

And now that the outlaws saw they must obey, they cast off their gloom and started off gayly down the road. And Robin Hood, who watched them thoughtfully, wondered at the sudden clustering together of his men, their bent heads, and lowered voices.

"Some mischief is afoot," he murmured to himself, and half started after them. But remembering that their hearts were not near him this day, he let them be, watching them wistfully as they broke up their conference and continued their way, running and laughing, will o' the wisps subject to childish moods, now sad and now gav as the heart dictated.

Even Little John had fallen under the shadow of discontent that had darkened the Vale of Peace, and he walked silently beside his master, offering not the solace

that Robin Hood needed from him.

"Come, thou comrade closest to my heart, let not little swords of doubt stab at thy lovalty. Shoot with me at yon bush and tree, and we will reward the victor with a shilling," said Robin Hood graciously.

Without a word, Little John shot, and it was as if the fairies of chance directed his arrows, for they flew with marvelous accuracy, chipping the bark from trees as slender as a lady's wrist and full three hundred yards away. And the better the shot from his tall yeoman, the worse the one that followed from the outlaw chief. Sly little breezes whipped suddenly through the foliage. carrying the slender arrows off their course.

"Oh," groaned Robin Hood, "my shafts are possessed

of the most wayward of spirits!"

And Little John, instead of offering his master a sympathetic word or a good-natured sally as was his wont. counted upon his fingers the sum that he had won by his excellent aim.

"Five shillings it is, Master, that I have rightfully taken from thee," he said sourly.

"I like not thy manner, Little John. And it is not five shillings, I swear," said Robin Hood in some anger.

"Five shillings," retorted Little John flatly.

Then the patience that made Robin Hood worthy of the title "Master," left the great outlaw chief. In his disappointment and hurt, he saw failure all about him. It seemed as if there could never again be an outlaw band of gay and loyal fellows to live for England and the Saxons and to serve the sweet Virgin who watched over them.

"Five shillings," said Little John mockingly.

Robin Hood pushed Little John away from him impatiently. But as soon as his hand touched the broad shoulder of his comrade, repentance surged through him. This was his Little John, whose heart echoed the refrains of his master's heart, whose eyes followed his chief like those of a faithful dog. Before the words of quick apology reached Robin Hood's lips, Little John turned his white set face away and disappeared into the thickets behind them, leaving Robin Hood to travel toward the church of St. Mary's alone.

* * *

The little parish priest of Nottingham hurried along the road that led to his church. He had spent the greater part of the day collecting the tithes that were evaded so skillfully by all the peasants of the countryside. His heart was sore within him, for the flock of St. Mary's church was an ill-assorted combination of lofty nobility and humble varlets, and though all of them were his responsibility for the cure of their souls, he could not make the rich and the poor happy with one another.

He reached the little chapel before the congregation had gathered. Entering into its quiet sanctuary, he knelt before the glowing altar to pray, dedicating himself again to the service of God and to the cure of souls. Rising, he looked at the great window, gorgeous and regal with color save for the single oval of stainless purity that marked the Virgin's face. He sighed softly, for in her presence he felt very uncertain of himself. It was as if a being of magic grace and beauty attended him, and he felt awkward beneath her gentle gaze.

His heart throbbed with fright as it always did just before the service. He hated his youth, for he felt quite helpless when he looked upon the silver-haired lords who were so much more worldly than he who spake to them. Who was he to cure the souls of men so much more regal than himself? The Latin of his chants was not the smooth sonorous melody of the archdeacon's Ave Maria's. He was often conscious that he was a Saxon, and that the Normans who came to his church would have hated and disdained him had he held not this holy office. And he found great difficulty with one of his duties. The archdeacon had told him time and again that he must instantly stop the service should any man enter the church that had been excommunicated and cut off from the fold. This seemed easy enough, but he could never remember the list of the black sheep, and so intent would he become upon the service that he saw no one clearly-only bowed heads, dark and silver, and the gold of his own Saxon race. Now the congregation had begun to enter the chapel. The little priest stole quietly back to where the list of the excommunicate was published. There was William Malet, old Peter Essex painfully he tried to memorize them all, and when he came to the bottom of the list and read off "Robin Hood. the outlaw, and all his band," he shivered slightly, for what could he alone do with such a great body of men.

and how would he know them if they wore not the famous Lincoln green? Should such men choose to disregard their ban, and he not discover them, the bishop would take away from him the little chapel he loved so dearly. He heard the choir begin the "Introit," before the "Gloria."

The young priest came to the altar and the soft light from the windows illumined his pale devout face as he listened to the "Kyrie Eleison" sung. Turning to the east he remained silent through the chorus, until at its close he faced his people again saying softly, "Pax vobis!"

As he began the "Oratio" he lifted his eyes and saw to his horror a fellow in Lincoln green, his round face wreathed in smiles, slipping into a bench near the door. The young priest, like a frightened schoolboy, stopped the service and strode up the aisle, his robes fluttering about him like the wings of a startled bird.

At the sign of the cross and the low murmur of warning, the fellow in Lincoln green shrugged his shoulders and went peaceably out the door. The people had shrunk into their seats at the sight of the green suit, and they all echoed the little priest's sigh of relief at the outlaw's departure. But scarce had the words of the Alleluia begun, just as the chapel rang with a chorus of praise to the Lord, when another fellow in Lincoln green framed in the doorway his stalwart figure. And again the nervous young priest could do naught but call a stop to the service, for an excommunicate was in their midst, and had not the archdeacon told him no member banned from the house of God could enter it while there was worship? In like manner the second outlaw retreated, smiling and peaceable, but the heart of the little priest

fluttered with fear, for in this calm acquiescence he saw further trouble. And now as he began to read the "Gospel," a third figure in Lincoln green appeared, and with crimson blushes staining his waxen face the little parson flew from the altar to order the man full twice his size to leave the Lord's chapel.

It was after the fifth outlaw had interrupted the service that Robin Hood arrived. His comrades hid in the thickets at his approach, knowing that he would be rightly angry at their prank, for he liked well the poor little parish priest and he himself carried mischief only as far as the church of the Lord, and never into it as the naughty outlaws had done. It was a sad and quiet Robin Hood who tiptoed gently through the sacred portals. His thoughts were with Little John who had run away from him, and with the band of merry fellows whom he had sent on to the chapel ahead of him. When he had accustomed his eyes to the dim light within, he saw no fellow in Lincoln green, and his heart was grieved that they had disobeyed him. The little priest was now so intent upon the service he noticed not the sixth invader of the sanctuary, and it was a silver-haired monk who recognized the outlaw chief and who hurried out the door and ran full speed to the house of the sheriff.

The outlaws who lurked in the thickets wondered that Robin Hood was not banished from the church as they had been. They heard the little priest's monotonous voice ending the gospel reading with "Pax tibi" and "Dominus vobiscum," and still their chief had not appeared.

"Is it that the Master moveth in a cloud and cannot be seen?" said Will Stutely impatiently. Then followed the fervent singing of the "Offertorium" and the low chant of the "Preface," the saying of the Angelic Hymn or "Sanctus," the "Canon," the Lord's Prayer and "embolism." The restless outlaws grew as weary as if they had been inside the chapel, and waited eagerly for the "Gloria."

While they were wondering why Robin Hood had not been ejected from the service, they heard the pound of horses' feet, and to their amazement saw the sheriff of Nottingham and a large body of men approaching the little chapel.

"There is some treachery here, brothers," whispered Will Scarlet. "We had best see what happens and then seek Little John, who will advise us what to do."

And before their frightened eyes the outlaws saw from the safety of their hiding place the sheriff and his men storm the church and bring forth Robin Hood, fighting gallantly against the whole of them.

Will Stutely started forward, but Scarlet held him back, saying grimly:

"Our prank hath brought disaster upon our dear Master. Little aid we would be to him now. We must creep warily away from Nottingham as soon as we see what is to be done with our Master, that we may form some plan for his rescue."

They saw the brave Robin Hood strike with clever strategy all who came near him, but as he brought down his sword upon the fat little sheriff's head, it broke in two, and he was quite helpless in the arms of the enemy.

"Kill him, hang him!" the people shouted in terror, as they gathered their velvet cloaks about them and viewed the great blond hero fearfully. And the few

Saxons present were silent, for they dared not oppose their Norman masters.

Only the little priest felt a glow of romance about the outlaw—saw the sadness in his eyes and wondered at it—longed to cut the ropes that bound the audacious Saxon.

And Robin Hood struggled no longer, for his heart was heavy. No outlaw had come to his rescue. None had gone to the little church as he had bidden them. It seemed as if a night of loneliness had come to him after his days of merry comradeship. He did not fear death, but death thrust upon him by his own band, death met without combat, was a bitter thing.

"He shall be hanged, never fear ye," smiled the sheriff. And turning to two of the posse who had captured Robin Hood, he ordered: "Go ye at once to Earl John, who has returned to London and will not come again to Nottingham for some months. Carry these letters telling of Robin Hood's capture, for word hath been left that His Highness wants to see the forest bird before he dies. In the meantime, cage him in the dungeon of Nottingham Castle."

And while the lonely outlaw chief was led away to prison, sorrow in his eyes, his tragic figure unattended, a little band of men crept noiselessly through the dusk and sped northward to Sherwood Forest to plan a rescue for the master they loved so dearly.

* * *

"By heaven, he will die," sobbed Will Stutely. "How can we rescue him? And why did we grieve him? And how could we have left him when he needed us?"

"Nay, nay, Will. Despair not," said Little John sternly. "He has served Our Lady many a day, and I trust her to save him now from so wicked a death."

"Oh, faith," moaned Friar Tuck, "I cannot swim a moat nor can I climb the walls of stone that surround the castle. Would I were a raven and could fly over—or a—"

"Hush with thy nonsense," cried Scarlet.

"'Tis no nonsense," retorted the friar. "Is it that wings would be of no help to us when arms and legs cannot conquer?"

"Come, 'tis no time to quarrel," said Little John. "There is a plan in my mind. Much as I would like to storm the castle of Nottingham, I see little hope of success in that manner of attack. Rather would I take a swift steed and follow those messengers who go to Earl John, waylay them, and go to the Earl ourselves bearing the letter."

"What, bear to the Earl the letter condemning our master to death! Thou art mad!" cried Friar Tuck.

"Patience. Put thy faith in me," said Little John. "Go ye all about your business and leave the matter with myself and one other."

Then each one clamored to be that other who was to go with him.

"It shall be Midge," said Little John at last. "He is new to the band, and he feeleth a deep guilt that this disaster hath befallen us, since it was he who first objected to going to mass at Nottingham."

And the other outlaws swallowed their disappointment, for they felt a great pity for Midge, the awkward newcomer whose eyes were clouded with tears and whose

body trembled with nervousness lest he had brought harm to the man he had come to love and honor. Then two black chargers were brought forth and Little John and Midge mounted them, turning their backs upon Sherwood. The shadows they cast on the white road that led to London town were winged phantoms of Mercury, so swiftly did they travel; and the only sound was the sharp clang of horses' hoofs on the stones of the road, for they wasted no breath on cheering words. The outlaws who were left behind listened to the trees whisper in the wind and the long mournful cry of a hurt bird. They were silent, each searching his own heart and finding there a passionate wish that their master would return to them in safety, and they vowed, should he return to them, never to be impatient with him again, even as men have vowed since the beginning of time to chain the irritations that have hurt those whom they loved.

When dawn colored the sky and the earth lay again in a light that banishes the mysteries of darkness, Little John and Midge saw a gray-haired monk accompanied by a page riding two silver horses some distance beyond.

"By the good St. Dunstan, we have followed our prey the night through but seen them not for the darkness upon us," said Little John. "Now that we have caught them fairly, let us play with them awhile before we pounce."

"Oh, but how canst thou speak of playing," cried poor guilty-hearted Midge, "when our Master lies at death's door?"

"Be of good cheer, young fellow," said Little John.
"Robin Hood will not die until word cometh from Earl
John to hang him, and as the Earl is in London town,

and we are upon the fellows who go to ask for his death, he will lack only a few creature comforts for another day or two in Nottingham Castle."

Midge forced a wan smile upon his face, and the two soon overtook the monk and the page who bore the news of Robin Hood's capture to the Earl.

"Good day," smiled Little John, "hast thou heard the great news?"

"Good day," answered the monk coldly. "Of what news dost thou speak?"

"By heaven, then thou hast not heard! There could be no greater news and all the countryside rejoices. The rogue Robin Hood has been captured and it is said he will die after Earl John has had a glimpse of him. I am glad of it, I tell thee. Why, scarce a year back it was when he robbed me of a hundred pounds as I passed unescorted along the Nottingham road."

It was all that Little John could do to keep from laughing when he finished this speech, for he had spoken so convincingly that not only was the monk beaming upon him, but Midge was regarding him as if he had lost his mind.

"Well, I am glad that thou agreest with the wise ones who have ordered his death," said the monk. "And proud am I this day to think that next to my heart lies the document that telleth the Earl of his crimes. It was I who recognized his bold countenance in St. Mary's chapel, I who denounced him to the sheriff, and now denounce him to the Earl."

At a signal from Little John, Midge seized the page, and it was child's play for Little John to relieve the monk of the warrant against Robin Hood and to tie up the two

messengers in a manner that allowed no chance for escape for many hours.

"Now we can go home," said Midge joyously.

"Midge, thou wouldst never make a wise and crafty leader," smiled Little John. "Home indeed, and what would we do there?"

"Why, rescue Robin Hood," the boy faltered.

"Nay, young fellow. We could do little indeed to rescue Robin Hood. We have no orders from the Earl to release him. We have only the sheriff's own warrant for his taking, and surely thou canst not think the crafty heads of Nottingham would not guess what we had done to the messengers they sent to London, should the very papers they sent to the Earl be returned to them."

"What shall we do, then," cried Midge in despair.

"Come thou with me to London town, and let me do the talking to the regent."

And after a short half hour the swift chargers brought their riders into London town. They found that Queen Eleanor had given these lesser duties to Earl John, so they went and gained immediate admittance when they showed the letters from the sheriff of Nottingham telling of Robin Hood's capture.

Earl John met the travelers from Nottingham cordially, for Nottingham was his favorite spot in England and he was the proud owner of its castle.

"God save you, my lord!" cried Little John, and Midge imitated him exactly, kneeling uncertainly and crying very timidly, "God save you, my lord!"

Then the Earl read the letters, and his princely features were alight with a merry smile, for he was a man of a light heart and took nothing very seriously.

"Well, well, by our Lady, there was never a yeoman in merry England that I have so longed to see as this famous Robin Hood. I have often thought he was not real—some figment of the peasants' imagination, some ghost of the dead Hereward risen to cheer the Saxons and to plague the Normans. Twenty pounds shall ye have for bringing me this news, good fellows, and I shall make ye yeomen of the crown. Don the jerkins my servants shall give ye and all England will recognize the position I have conferred upon ye."

Then Little John thanked His Highness and nudged Midge to do likewise, for the boy was so frightened he could scarce make any words come in the presence of royalty.

"I shall send my privy seal with you to the sheriff of Nottingham, saying that the knave Robin Hood shall be brought to me at once, unharmed, and after I have seen him we shall consider the manner of his death."

"Death," cried Midge, but Little John quickly covered the young boy's confusion.

"Death to Robin Hood will be a feather in thy cap, my lord," said Little John flatteringly. "He has escaped us all so long, even when we had him upon the gallows. To kill Robin Hood is like losing one's shadow, capturing the moon, dodging a raindrop."

John, the King's brother, laughed, and the hardness in his eyes and about his delicate mouth told the outlaws that though he might be weak, ruthlessness lay in his heart.

"I am not afraid now that the moon is captured to drown it, to tear it in shreds, to burn it in its own fire," said the Earl of Mortain. Taking the letter of Earl John, Little John and Midge set forth, thankful they had come thus far undiscovered through their adventure. But they knew the greatest danger lay ahead of them. Reaching the thickets where they had hidden the monk and the page, they found the bonds had held and the sheriff's messengers were still prisoners.

"I will send word to the sheriff at dawn to release

you," smiled Little John in farewell.

All that night the chargers galloped toward Nottingham. They rested the next day at a small inn, and so swiftly did they travel that they reached the sheriff's house the next night when all the town was sleeping and before the sun had risen.

Loudly did Little John beat upon the door, and the sheriff answered it himself, his eyes red with sleep and his squat form ridiculous in its sleeping garment.

He read the word of the Earl, and brought forth wine for the yeomen of the crown, as was the custom. As soon as the sheriff drank his cup dry, Midge would slyly fill it again. And so steeped with glory and wine the Nottingham official became that he viewed the Earl's messengers through a mist of good-will, and when he asked where the monk and the page were, they told him that the Earl was entertaining them in honor of the capture.

"We have caught him in our net at last," the sheriff chuckled to himself. "He will look pretty riding upon a palfrey to London town with all the countryside watching him go to his death."

"What does the rogue look like?" asked Little John. "Go and take a look," laughed the sheriff sleepily.

"Here are the keys to the dungeon. You will find him behind a barred wall, on the edge of a deep well. He dare not move himself lest he fall in."

Then sleep and wine drugged the sheriff into a limp and lifeless figure, and Little John and Midge slipped quietly from the room, and made their way to the jail. Here the porter when he saw that they were yeomen of the crown, lowered the bridge over the moat and allowed them to use their keys to open the great dungeon door. But when they turned upon him demanding the keys to Robin Hood's cell, he howled for mercy, knowing them for members of the band of outlaws, for who else would dare to uncage the forest beast, Robin Hood?

"Is it better that thou be killed than found guilty of treachery?" asked Little John.

"I beg of you to tie me up as if I had struggled with you," moaned the abject porter. "Then, I swear, you shall have the keys and all the help I can give you."

So Little John, who knew that his master did not want their enemies slain, tied the porter up until he looked like a turnip sack with a head; then he rushed straightway to his master. They came upon the cell all at once from behind a great pillar, and saw the chief kneeling on the edge of the deep well, his white face transfigured as he prayed to the Virgin for strength to meet his death.

"Master," whispered Little John. "Silence, for there are guards without. We have come to save thee, but it is best that thou dress thyself in the porter's clothes."

Robin Hood reeled as they opened the door, for he had had no food for two days. His hands touched his comrades, his eyes devoured them with gratitude. Weakly he tried to speak.

"I have come home to you through the grace of Our Lady and through your unending devotion," he cried

joyously.

Then Robin Hood attired himself in the porter's garments and, swinging the great ring of keys, he led his two comrades past the sleeping guards and into the great courtyard of the castle. Here Little John used the sheriff's key to unlock the gate of the wall, and only the moat lay between the three and freedom. Not daring to put the bridge down, they swam across.

The cold stream put new vigor into them, and when they reached the bank they hurried off through the thickets to where the chargers were hidden. Soon they were away, racing with the dawn toward the refuge of

Sherwood Forest.

When the red ball of the sun sent its molten shafts into the glades, the outlaws awoke, and heavy were their hearts, for now two days had passed while their Robin lay in captivity, and no word had come from Little John and Midge. They faced each other with forced gayety, for such was the way their master would have had them act, but each knew that dread lay in the other's heart. And then the faint blast of a horn came to them—a singing welcome. They rushed blindly toward it. So the birds follow the call of their mates. They laughed with wild unguarded melody; they called him, "Robin, Our Robin, Robin Hood!"

And when they met his prancing steed they flung themselves before him until he begged them laughingly to rise, and instead of forgiveness, he told them gently there was nothing to forgive. And he turned to Little John as penitently as they had turned to him, saying:

"I make thee master, Little John. Thou hast done me a good turn for an ill. Canst thou forget that I struck thee in anger? I have asked too much of these brave fellows in begging them to echo my love for the Virgin and my desire to go to mass. Let me stay an outlaw, brothers, but make Little John thy chief."

"Nay, good Master, that shall never be. Let us all stay with thee forever and we shall forget this day," said Little John, and the outlaws cried, "Long live our Robin Hood!"

But the day was not soon forgotten. The outlaws had seen the shadow that hung over their band. They knew now that Robin Hood could only live in safety beneath the greenwood trees, that danger lay in Nottingham, and that they must never leave him unattended.

Nay, the day was not forgotten. The sheriff of Nottingham had found his porter tied, robbed of his keys, and his prisoner flown. When the taste of the ale had gone, when the drowsiness of a long sleep had been driven away, the stupid official of Nottingham saw that the messengers from the Earl were none other than outlaws, and swiftly he sent word to London town. And when he received word by a strange message pinned to his doorway that the monk and the page he had sent to London lay tied in bundles some miles away, dreadful was his wrath, and all fled from him.

And there, in the safety of a great castle, Earl John laughed a little nervously and wondered fearfully whether Sir Guy of Gisborne would consider the mistake to be one that could have been avoided. And a feeling of wonder entered the weak Earl's heart, a wonder that men could love one another so deeply that they would

risk their lives to save the man that was their master. Who in all England would serve him as Robin Hood was served? And to the wrath of the sheriff of Nottingham and to the amazement of the band of outlaws, a great document came to Sherwood carried by pages dressed in scarlet and gold. And this was the strange news that set all England laughing: Earl John had told the sheriff that Little John had beguiled them all, and so cleverly was it done he must be made a yeoman of the crown, and paid royally if he would join the royal guard. And when Sir Guy of Gisborne asked His Highness what this strange action meant, Earl John answered, "Much as I wish for loyalty, I shall never have it, nor shall my brother Richard the true king," he added grimly. "And so let the only loyalty I find in England be rewarded this day."

But never did Little John travel to London to get his pay, and Earl John quieted the angry sheriff, saying:

"Speak no more of this matter. Little John is true to his master and loveth him better than us all. Let him be the victor this time, and we shall see about the future."

"For once this would-be king hath spoken truthfully," laughed Little John, safe in Sherwood.

But for once Robin Hood did not join in the merriment. His joy at the love of his comrades was far too deep for laughter, and long afterward they remembered his grave silence and his shining eyes.

ROBIN HOOD TURNS SAILOR

Robin Hood's merry smile had flown away. The outlaws sought anxiously to please him, but it was like trying to rouse a sleeper from the mystery of dreamland. He smiled at their gay sallies, but no longer met their wit with swift retort and matchless joyousness. At last one sultry summer night under a red harvest moon, Robin gathered his band about him and spoke to them pleadingly, an undercurrent of passionate feeling in his voice:

"Brothers, the gypsy call rings in my ears. Too long have I stayed in the quietness of Sherwood Forest. All the humors of my body draw me away from the too familiar Vale of Peace. I prithee let me leave the band for a little while. I long to be away and follow the stars and the white road. Let me forget for a little our lovely peaceful grove that Friar Tuck hath called Cathedral Lane, forget for a time the shadows lying over England."

They turned their bronzed faces toward their chief in wonder. What would Sherwood be without him? Who would call them when the first streaks of a red dawn appeared in the east? Who would turn their days into glorious adventures? Their eyes were dark with dismay, and no words came to their lips, so filled with amazement were their hearts. It was Little John who murmured softly:

"Bute dosta Romany chals."

"What art thou saying?" cried Will Stutely, his round blue eyes shining with tears.

"The words belong to an ancient language, older even than the speech of Rome," answered Robin Hood gently. "Little John shall teach thee its strange accents some day."

"But what did he tell thee?" echoed Midge, his boyish

face alight with love.

"This phrase I whispered to our Master," answered Little John, "hoping that he would not leave us. His heart belongeth to that gypsy race that hath no country but the open sky and the starlit fields. And the strange words I spake to him signified that plenty of his wandering brothers are here, but should he leave the wildwood he may find near him only dull hulking fellows like you sheriff of Nottingham who understand neither the Romany words nor the gypsy thoughts that he so loves. Men in far-away Bohemia would feel no wonder at a stranger tramping the dark roads all night and day. There, dear Master, thou wouldst find a welcome at every fireside—no questions asked thee and a kindred worship of the earth and sky. But here in England men hide themselves in tidy cottages. A roof breaks the fall of the snow, the red flames of the household fire are held captive between four walls, and only the thin blue smoke curling up from the chimney meets the stranger's eye. Thou wouldst encounter suspicion and danger in every village. Stay thou, dear Master, in the refuge of our forest home."

But Little John's words had only painted the picture of Robin Hood's dreams. He leaned against a great oak and faced them commandingly.

"Come, ye children of nightmares. Hide not your eyes from danger, for only by courting it can we fire our sensible English hearts. I will come back to you soon—a fortnight's play, and new scenes engraved upon my heart to ponder over through the long winter nights. Farewell! I go northward where a gray sea lashes England's shores, and should your hearts be troubled at the distance between us, remember, comrades, that the same stars shine upon me and you."

* * *

For the second time in his life Robin Hood found days merging into days, leaving no mark of time upon him. This wandering was like the wandering in France where he had found peace after his father's death so many years before. At first he was lonely, wishing he had not left his merry comrades. He missed the mockery of Friar Tuck, the helpless Midge so unaccustomed to an outlaw's ways, and the rock of surety he found in Little John. But his cloistered existence became a play with him. Here was comradeship with his own heart. Here were his wondrous thoughts. He gave them wings, and they brought him the magic presence of the past. All the phantoms of his youth accompanied him as he traveled aimlessly to the northward—a horseman on a hill who was a great archbishop, his rugged Saxon father, the pale ascetic features of John of Salisbury who had taught him the French language and the Latin Ave's to the Virgin.

And when he reached York, men told him that some forty miles northeast was a great bay of the North Sea. On one promontory lay the city of Scarborough, the

home of many fishermen, while farther to the north, on the other side of the bay, was the little town of Whitby where stood the noble monastery of Presteby in honor of the Virgin.

And Robin Hood, as he set forth to Whitby to pay his respects to the Virgin, marveled at the strange manner in which life repeats itself, for so he had set forth to Chartres in much the same mood so many years before. He arrived at Whitby in a fierce storm. But by now he was quivering with the excitement of seeing his Lady again, and he ascended the steep and slippery rocks to the abbey grounds that lay below the town on a shelf overlooking the dashing waves. His heart beat in painful throbs, and he felt unexpected tears in his eyes. So it was when Robin Hood left his loneliness to kneel before one he loved, and the pain he felt was the pain of the human heart giving its utmost to another. Before he entered the abbey he gazed long at the tumultuous ocean and he heard with a slight shudder the piercing screams of the sea gulls.

Within, a tall old monk whose eyes reflected the cold gray of the sea without told the outlaw the legends that belonged to this abbey of St. Mary. And Robin Hood heard how the Northumbrian King Oswy had promised the Virgin to build a monastery in her honor if he could defeat the heathen King Penda of Mercia. And this he did. Here, five hundred years before, a council had been held which had united the Celtic Church with the Roman; and here it was that Caedmon, the cowherd who became England's first Poet Laureate, sang his songs of the Creator.

[&]quot;What did he sing?" asked Robin.

And the old monk echoed the song of Caedmon in a thin high melody of sweetness:

There was not yet then here. except gloom like a cavern. anything made. But the wide ground stood deep and dim for a new lordship. shapeless and unsuitable. On which his eyes glanced, the king stern in mind, and the joyless place beheld. He saw the dark clouds perpetually press black under the sky, till this world's creation thro' the word was done of the King of Glory. Here first made The Eternal Lord. the patron of all creatures, heaven and earth. He reared the sky, and the roomy land established with strong powers, Almighty Ruler! The earth was then yet with grass not green: With the ocean covered, perpetually black far and wide the desert ways.

"Seest thou the rocks along the coast?" said the monk.
"Yea," answered Robin Hood. "I have wondered
at their strange shapes."

"As the legend goeth, at the foundation of the abbey the vale of Whitby was infested by poisonous snakes. The first abbess, St. Hilda, drove them away, and there they lie petrified into rocks," the old man said seriously.

"But peace hath been here ever since," said Robin.

"Nay," replied the old man sadly. "Many have made war upon our Lady. The Vikings have twice burned and plundered in the last three hundred years, and the harsh winds from the sea, bringing with them heavy rains, have beaten the abbey into ruins. Come thou into the chapel and kneel before the Virgin."

Robin Hood followed the old monk, and again he marveled as he saw his Lady's face. Here in the harsh northland she stood with the same quiet dignity and grace he had found in sunny France. And again she seemed to mock at his seriousness, and he knew that no longer must he wander like a hermit through the lonely corridors of his own mind, neither sharing nor receiving the thoughts of other men. He left her quickly. And the old monk frowned upon him, thinking that he cared not for her since he did not linger near her. But the outlaw had seen in her teasing, laughing eyes the gentle reproach that he deserved for wearing such a solemn mien.

Robin Hood turned back toward the little town of Whitby, eager to mingle with people again. As years before in France he had felt just such a reawakening and had hurried back to England to become an outlaw, so now the mood of reflection passed, and his keen eyes were alert for adventure. But adventure was not to be found in the peaceful surroundings of the village. He saw the fishermen working over their nets and spoke to them.

"Is there a place for a stranger upon your boats?" he asked.

They shook their heads and answered him brusquely.

"Nay, with so many fish in yon sea, our boats hold only so many men to catch them. We cannot make room for such as thee, for our sons and cousins and our sons' sons go aboard with us."

Then Robin Hood turned away impatiently, for now that life coursed again in his body he could scarcely wait for some activity. Whitby on the banks of the pretty little river Esk suddenly seemed to him like a piece of tapestry. The people he sought words with eyed him with indifference. Near the winding river the pastoral country lay in painted silence. The fierce storm that had swept in from the sea on his arrival, casting over him a spell of gloom and fear, had gone. The clouds had disappeared and glittering sunlight shone over the abbey hill and the bay below. The surging gray of the sea had quieted, and great oily surfaces of water moved and undulated as if a restless monster lay beneath, but no angry foam swept in to shore, and the shrieking gulls had flown high into the clear heavens again.

"Stranger," a voice recalled him. And he turned to see a slim lad with eyes as blue as his own, regarding him.

"Yes, my lad," Robin Hood answered the boy kindly, for the worshiping gaze that met his own reminded him curiously of the adoring Midge back in Sherwood.

"Around the curve of yon bay lies Scarborough. There are men who fear not the sea and who build greater ships than those in Whitby. Go thou to that city, and in the harbor which lieth on the south side of a great castle that cannot help but meet thine eye, are many fishing boats whose fishermen will take thee as crew," said the boy.

Robin Hood thanked the lad, and, half hesitating, regarded him, wishing to take him along on the adventure

he knew awaited him. But searching the blue depths of the other's eyes, he saw there the passive soul of Whitby and felt that to make this boy an outlaw would be too difficult a task. So he thanked him again and, mounting his horse, turned southward over the high moors toward Scarborough.

He noticed not the beautiful countryside. Down through wooded valleys galloped the charger, and after a ride of a few hours he came to a bold and picturesque coast, rockier than that at Whitby and much fiercer to the eye. At the top of the steepest cliff he had ever laid eyes upon, stood a great castle that he remembered was built by the late King Henry himself, so those at York had said. Around the town were high walls with towers and a keep or watchtower that had been built by the Normans a century before.

Robin wasted little time in his approach to the harbor lying to the south of the great cliff on which the castle stood. It lay there, a circular pool of tranquillity compared to the raging sea beyond, with vessels of every kind and size anchored. Galleys with single tiers of oars and with double tiers, called dromonds, a chelande, being a ship of extraordinary length with two tiers of oars, requiring a crew as large as one hundred and fifty men. order to preserve the wood of the ships they had been covered with pitch and, in some few cases, colored yellow and vermilion. Silver and gold figures decorated the prows, and smaller sailing ships dotting the bay lifted graceful sails of purple and gold, emblazoned with images of saints, a sacramental word, a sacred sign, or the figure of the Virgin intended to withstand the evil spirits and bring the fishermen safely back to Scarborough.

The salty smell of the sea, the distant roaring of the surf, limitless horizons—Robin Hood's fancy caught it all, and as he watched the fishermen running about the decks, climbing the riggings, gathering their nets together, he could wait no longer. Laughing with excitement, he hurried down to the harbor. All along the shore men worked busily, paying no attention to the stranger. Finally he approached one who seemed to be the owner of a ship, for he was doing naught but order the others.

"Hast thou room for me on thy ship?" asked Robin.

"And who mayst thou be?" answered the sturdy little man eyeing him sharply from behind his bushy brows.

"I'faith, a poor fisherman," sighed Robin Hood.

"And a poor fisherman, I'll wager, thou wouldst be," laughed the captain loudly.

Robin Hood could scarce keep from telling him whom he addressed so carelessly, but he continued to play the part of a fisherman with no ship to sail upon.

"What is thy name, landlubber?" laughed the ship-master.

"At home they call me Simon over the Lea," answered Robin.

"But it is not a sailor of the lea we desire, for never yet have I seen fish swim in aught but the sea," teased the stout little captain.

And now Robin Hood half turned to go, for his heart was angry at this mockery. And well he knew that the captain spoke the truth, for he knew little about the use of masts and ropes and baited hooks. Suddenly a young man ran up to the captain, his face flushed with excitement, crying:

"Master, old Timothy hath fallen dead!—Pray to Heaven that no more of us may die. It is the ebb tide, and well thou knowest that at such a time men's lives go out with the sea."

Then the shipmaster turned pale beneath his weathered tan.

"Holy Mother! Oh, thou sweet Mary," he wept, his eyes turned devoutly toward the heavens, "why hast thou deserted me?"

"Was old Timothy such an important member of thy crew?" asked Robin Hood.

"Nay, and that statement proclaimeth thee a landlubber for certain," said the captain scornfully. "Knowest thou not that ebb tide meaneth death, and that death to one of a ship's crew can only portend disaster? Mark my word, stranger, more than one fisherman will desert me this day."

And so it was indeed, for the mysterious ending of old Timothy frightened four great strong fellows away. Then the captain said to Robin Hood, "I'faith, thou canst do little good, but being short of men I shall take thee."

For the next few days life became to Robin Hood an amazing experience—at sea, tossed about mercilessly, drenched to the skin, with his eyes smarting from the cold salt water, thrown again and again upon the slippery deck, his words swept from his mouth by the terrible wind, his ears deafened by the roaring waters. The rough sailors seized upon him as an outlet to their melancholy. They blamed him for all manner of things.

"Thou hast frightened the herring away," they grumbled.

"It will be long," groaned the master, "ere this great lubber do thrive on the sea."

"He shall have no part of our fish," sulked another, "for in truth he is in no part worthy."

"Should there be any fish," said the captain gloomily.

"Woe is me, why did I come?" said Robin.

But they could not help laughing at his awkward attempts at landing and at baiting again. And Robin's proud nature was sorely tried, for always had he been a leader, and here he could not even follow correctly.

"I would I were in Plompton Park chasing the fallow deer," he moaned.

"The fellow aspires to be a Robin Hood," they laughed, and the poor outlaw chief was indeed helpless. For had he told them he was indeed Robin Hood himself they would have thought he had lost his head, and probably thrown him overboard lest he bring them bad luck.

But the third day at sea dawned, and Robin Hood's heart was cheered, he knew not why. The clownish fishermen continued to tease him. He made the same sorry mistakes. But he felt a sense of strength filling him, and somehow knew that this strength was to be tested and that he would again be a leader, even among strangers on an unfamiliar sea. Scracely knowing why, he put his arrows at his belt and strapped his bow securely upon him before he bent over the nets.

While they worked, deafened and nearly blinded by the sea, danger approached and, strangely enough, it was the landsman Robin Hood who first saw it.

"Master! Look ye!" he cried. And following his gaze they saw a great pirate ship approaching. It was

painted green from mast to waterline that it might blend with the emerald of the sea and come upon its

prey undiscovered.

"Woe is me!" cried the captain. "Disaster is upon us. All our fish will be taken from us and we shall be made prisoners by these French robbers and taken to some foreign coast."

And all the fishermen of Scarborough fell to their knees and with their hands lifted to the figure of the Virgin emblazoned on the sails, begged her to save them. Then Robin Hood's heart beat with triumph.

"This is no time to pray," he cried commandingly. "The Virgin watcheth over us, but we must fight our own battles. Fear not, with my bent bow in my hand never

a Frenchman will I spare."

"Hold thy peace, thou landlubber, for thou art naught but brags and boast," sobbed a slim youth who thought of a golden-haired girl awaiting his return.

"I'faith, let him rave," cried another. "But when he drowns 'twill be only a landlubber lost, and when the French throw us into the sea 'twill be the loss of the best

fishermen in all England."

So angry did Robin Hood become at their jeers that he climbed the mast and, drawing an arrow to its very head, he aimed at a Frenchman's heart. Straightway flew the arrow, the wind curving it a little. But this the master shooter had counted upon. He saw it meet its mark a hundred yards away. He saw a body fall down on the ship hatch, even as the body of a deer had often fallen before his aim on the ground of Sherwood Forest. Before the amazed fishermen could cry out in wonder, another arrow had met its target and the dark, rat-like

head of a Frenchman lurking under the hatches was bowed forever.

"Carry the ship into them," commanded Robin Hood, "and I shall leap aboard and put an arrow into every heart."

And something in his voice made them obey. They rose from their knees and set to work, and soon the fishing craft was near enough for Robin to board the French ship. Here the dark-haired pirates rushed forward with shining knives, but before they could hurl their weapons the arrows were upon them, and those who were not transfixed, fled in an agony of terror at the unexpected onslaught of arrows from English fishermen, who usually surrendered without battle. The Scarborough fishermen hunted them into corners and there tied them, where they lay moaning bitterly and praying to the Virgin in a foreign tongue.

On the pirate ship they found twelve thousand pounds of bright money, and Simon over the Lea, for so Robin Hood was called by the fishermen, gave half to the ship and kept the other half, saying he would build with it a home for the oppressed.

"Nay," bespoke the master. "Thou hast won it all with thine own hand. Therefore it is all thine and thou art master here."

"Half the gold for thee," cried Robin Hood happily, "and, kind friends, I thank thee for this honor but I cannot be a master on the sea."

For a moment they smiled as they imagined him directing their fishing, knowing full well that few herring would come their way with such an inexperienced leader to plan their course. But loyalty quieted their laughter. This stranger had saved their lives, their ship, their fish, and he must be rewarded.

"Thou didst command as if thou hadst done it before," said the captain. "I'faith, I am curious about thee. Such shooting I have never seen."

"Then thou hast not seen Robin Hood," smiled the

stranger who had saved them.

"It is something I have always wished for," answered the captain a little sadly. "There is one who loveth England. Before I die I pray that I may set my old eyes upon him."

All the way back to Scarborough the fishermen followed Simon over the Lea in all he did or said. They found him the merriest man alive and begged him to sail with them always. But when the vessel entered the great bay lying between Whitby and Scarborough, they forgot him and their eyes sought the rugged coast, and once again they were glad that they had come back safely from the terrors of the unknown sea. Only the little captain stood like a shadow at the outlaw's side, musing and a little curious as to who this gay fellow could be.

"Where goest thou from here, comrade?" asked the captain.

"My heart is lonely," answered Robin Hood.

"How meanest thou—lonely?" said the little ship-master curiously. And, for a moment caught unguarded, Robin Hood spoke the thoughts in his mind.

"I long for a sight of Sherwood Forest," the outlaw said. "Eager am I to see once more him who is my closest comrade, one Little John—" here Robin Hood stopped in dismay, for the little captain had turned scarlet, was dancing about him, kissing his hand, and crying

for the other fishermen of Scarborough. They rushed to him thinking that his joy at seeing land again had sent him into madness.

"Robin Hood! It is he! This stranger yonder is none other than the outlaw chief," he cried.

And somehow they knew that he spake the truth, for who could have shot with such amazing speed and accuracy, who could have been so merry and so brave when disaster threatened them?

"Hast thou come to stay among us?" they cried eagerly after they had thanked him.

"Nay, good fishermen of Scarborough. 'Twas but a moment's whim that led me away from Sherwood. Perchance I shall never go away again, once I have returned."

And when they went ashore they whispered together as to what to give the hero in reward, but turning to seek him they found that he had gone. Loudly they called him and eagerly they searched, and men in the town told that soon after the ship had landed, a horseman with head bent had galloped southward over the moors. Robin Hood had gone home, and those new friends he had left grieved a little at his departure.

"Dost thou remember the way he climbed the mast and shot one hundred yards away?" said the little captain dreamily.

"And how he lost the biggest herring of the trip?" chuckled one of them.

"He is not a proud fellow at all," mused another. "Gay was his manner among us."

Then the little captain, who had looked upon the outlaw before his death even as he had longed to, spoke, and all of Scarborough listened, for he was the oldest mariner among them and his word was law in matters pertaining to the sea.

"Sherwood Forest will have Robin Hood forever," said the little man solemnly, "but we have had him only for an hour or two. Let us call that part of the ageless everlasting sea that lies between here and Whitby town, Robin Hood's Bay—that we may have him always too."

And this they did, and to this very day the memory of gay Robin Hood belongs to Scarborough town.

ROBIN HOOD'S JOURNEY HOMEWARD

Robin Hood rode slowly, once he had left Scarborough behind him. The excitement of the adventure at sea had wearied him, and passing a great grove of thickleafed trees, he tied his horse and lay down, falling at once into a deep and dreamless slumber. He was awakened by a gentle touch on his shoulder and for a moment knew not where he was. The green and gold of sun and trees danced before his eyes, blinding him. Could this be Sherwood again, and was this slim figure before him Midge, the unruly, lovable youngest member of the band, daring to awake him before he was ready? He rubbed his eyes and looked into the face of the one who had awakened him. He saw to his amazement the sensitive girlish features of the young boy from Whitby who had told him the way to Scarborough when all the other fishermen had ignored him. He saw eyes azure blue and wide with wonder, regarding him in boyish worship.

"Well, lad, how didst thou chance to come upon me, and why didst thou leave the fair and comfortable town of Whitby for a hot, dusty road?" asked Robin Hood kindly.

"Stranger, I loved thee at first sight. There was something about thee that made my heart stir, and never has it thrilled before at sight of maiden, man, or scene. And ever since thy departure a wild unrest hath filled me. I have felt a strange and urgent need of thy

company. So I followed thee to Scarborough, and there found the town in an uproar of excitement."

"By the good St. Dunstan! And what hath hap-

pened to Scarborough town?" smiled Robin Hood.
"Tease me not, stranger. Well thou knowest that the mariners of Scarborough are this moment crying thy praises. They told me who thou truly art, and I knew then why I had wondered about thee."

"But why hast thou followed me? The good people of Whitby will be worried about thee. They are not made of impulse and of dreams as thou art, lad. They will think thou hast fallen over a cliff, for how else would thy departure be accounted for?"

The boy lifted his well-shaped head impatiently and seemed to quiver and to rear as does a sensitive young

colt at an obstacle in its path.

"Thou wouldst not have me give up my dreams for such as they," cried the boy.

"What are thy dreams?" asked Robin Hood kindly.

"Dreams of Robin Hood's band," said the youth. "Long before thou camest northward thy fame reached us, and I have kept thee in my secret heart for many years. I did not know thee at Whitby, but I felt a magic something about thee and wondered at it. I followed thee to Scarborough much as the moth seeks the flame. And then when I found that thou wert truly Robin Hood, my heart, my spirit, all of me cried out for thee. the words I whispered to my horse gave him wings, and together we flew over the moors to thee."

"These are fancies, son, born of a daring soul reared in a peaceful gathering. What is thy name, that I may

always remember thee?"

"Peter Clifton they call me—but what meanest thou 'remember' me? I shall be at thy side always, together with the great Little John of whom they tell. Thou canst not forget me."

"Some day, perhaps, thou shalt come to me. But now for a while thy place is in Whitby town where, perchance, a loving father weeps for thee this very moment. Let a few years pass thee by. Long years of waiting they need not be. Fill them full of thought and dreams, and work hard lest thy muscles grow flabby and soft and thy tender heart grow sick with sentiment. Then when thou hast become a man, search thy mind. Look well into its crystal depths, read what lieth there, and if thy desire still is to join Robin Hood, come thou swiftly to Sherwood and we will welcome thee."

At first young Peter Clifton's cheeks grew scarlet with rebellion, but when his wet blue eyes sought Robin's, he grew suddenly calm. He saw a slim, tall figure indolently posed against a tree, a curving smile, laughing eyes, now blue in the sun, now violet in the shade, hair of dark gold with strange little silver streaks near the temples which did not seem to tell of years. Rather it was as if the sun had faded the dark gold into a pale silver, just as the few wrinkles around the deep eyes spoke not of age but of laughing thoughts. Life had left the mark of its wings upon the famous outlaw—a touch of silver plumage and a delicate feather line. Now the expression of the older man was one of such understanding that the boy knelt before him, bowing his head to hide his tears.

"Goodby then—a sad farewell, Master. I may call thee Master? You see, I know my heart is changeless. Always have I wanted to serve Robin Hood, and so it will be until I die. I will go back to Whitby, to the long and ugly days, serving my apprenticeship to manhood."

"Nobly hast thou spoken, young Peter Clifton. Give me thy hand. There! Thou hast engraved thy memory upon my heart. Let thy wayward dreams strain in captivity a little longer. Then come to me."

"But Master, since I must obey thee and go, give me a word to carry away—a word from thy heart that

I may cherish."

Robin Hood's eyes grew soft in reverie, then suddenly he straightened, and the fire of ardor was in his expression as he laid his hand upon the boy's head and cried earnestly, "For Mary and the Saxons!"

"For Mary and the Saxons," the young follower whispered, and for many days the words from his master's lips were to be a steady refrain beating eternally against his heart.

The boy tore himself away, his girlish mouth quivering with disappointment. He smiled tremulously and ran off to his horse, mounting it and galloping to the north without turning back.

"It is the way of youth," smiled Robin tenderly, "to find a few years an eternity, to see in a goodby a stark finality. I hear the long wailing of his tender heart and feel the terrible impatience of his spirit. Yesterday it was that I walked in a Canterbury garden and dreamed of scaling a Norman wall."

Robin Hood mounted his horse and started forth slowly, for the day was hot and breathless. Now that he was on his way toward Sherwood, he knew that a few hours longer on the road would matter little. He had gone scarce a quarter of a mile when he came upon a

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little stream, and bending over it was a portly man with sandy hair and beard and a face red as fire with the heat.

The outlaw dismounted and, approaching the stranger, noticed to his amazement the man held a small rag in his hand which he dipped in the water and then beat thrice upon a great flat stone, saying:

I knok this rag upone this stane To raise the wind in the divellis name, It sall not lye till I please againe.

"Whatever art thou doing?" asked Robin Hood, greatly amused and puzzled.

The man looked up at him crossly, and deliberately

repeated the strange actions before answering.

"How doth it concern thee what I am doing?" he asked. "But I will tell thee to stop thy questioning. I am a Scotchman traveling through the East Riding of Yorkshire that I may see how they kill the corn spirit here. As thou knowest, if thou hast any sensibilities, not a breath of wind stirreth. In Scotland when such a condition cometh upon us, we make the wind blow. And this is the art of the magical control of the wind: dip the rag into a stream, strike lightly three times—if too heavily a hurricane would come upon us—and then say the charm thou heardest me repeat."

Robin Hood laughed gayly, and the stranger, liking

not his manner, stood up quickly.

"Who art thou who questions me and the wisdom of my forefathers? Hark thou, the wind rustles the leaves of you thicket. It hath obeyed me. What is thy name? Let me see if thou art worth quarreling with."

"My name is Robin Hood."

"By my faith, I will serve thee. Here I am, offering myself to thee freely. I have often thought to join thee would be an excellent way to fill my coffers, for the tales of thy robbery are known far and wide."

"Speak not of robbery," reproved Robin Hood, "for such we would not stoop to. Say rather that we

relieve the rich and poor all at once."

"There is no better term than 'rob,' " retorted the Scotchman crustily. "Nay, thou robbest, thou stealest, thou art naught but a highwayman."

As Robin Hood's eyes flashed, the frankly spoken little man mumbled, "Well, anyhow, I would not join a band of thieves, would I? Feel no insult, for one who only taketh from the purse-proud and giveth generously to the poor as thou dost, cannot be hurt by my words. Though the Scot in me sayeth thou art foolish to give, the man in me cannot but agree."

Then Robin Hood saw that this irritable Scot was true and good within his heart and perchance worthy of his consideration, but he did not wish to enlist him too readily.

"Nay, thou canst not join me," said Robin Hood sternly. "Thou wouldst prove false to me to save thy pennies, and I need no more outlaws in my band."

Then the Scotchman carefully put down the little rag that he had used to call the wind back into the treetops,

and rolling up his sleeves, said:

"I would have a bout with thee. I swear I would be as true as thy heart and never leave thee, but if thou wilt not take me on my faith, I will use my strength to make my way into thy band. My name is Sawney, shouldst thou have need to cry 'Hold'!"

At this conceit Robin could contain himself no longer, though he saw no worthy cause in this bout. He threw himself headlong into combat, expecting to win the fight easily and proceed on his way. But the sun faded from the heavens. The horizon changed from pale lemon into a soft jade, and finally the border of black trees met the border of descending night, and darkness fell over the earth. And now, though no one had won the battle, two hours had passed and the blows that Sawney gave bold Robin Hood were so steady that the faltering outlaw finally cried:

"Have mercy, thou Scotchman. Full dearly this boon have I bought. We will agree. I shall make thee my man, and no stouter foe have I ever met with. I trust that thou shalt be happy in Sherwood."

"I shall keep thy money for thee," said the Scotchman practically, "for who knows, a day may come when robbing highways is not so easy as it is this day. Now follow me before we go to Sherwood to the little town of Beverly in the East Riding of Yorkshire, where the harvest feast and the 'burning of the old Witch' is to be held this night."

It was but a short gallop to Beverly, and here Robin Hood saw a sight that never failed to thrill him—the sacrificial act of the killing of the corn spirit on the last night of harvest. In the center of a large field a small sheaf of corn was piled by the villagers, and, setting it alight, they watched the flames rise—fantastic tongues of yellow and orange licking the darkness, ever alive, moving, quivering, nervously leaping and dying. Peas were parched by the onlookers, and the children blackened each other's faces and played games long after their

usual bedtime; such games as "Oranges and Lemons," where the little girls formed an arch under which the players passed, all gayly singing:

Here comes a chopper to chop off your head, The last, last, last man's head.

And with the words "last man's head" the slender girlish arms descended quickly, catching the child who was then passing. Robin Hood and the Scotchman joined opposite sides in a tug-of-war, and great was the chagrin of Robin Hood to find that the stout Sawney was again on the winning side.

But Robin Hood was impatient at the delay and, no longer interested in the harvest feast of Beverly, motioned to the Scotchman to come away if he seriously intended to come to Sherwood to join the outlaws. The stout Scot sighed at leaving the pleasant gathering where ale and food could be had for the asking, but nevertheless followed the outlaw.

They turned southwest toward Nottingham.

"We shall ride all the night through," said Robin Hood, "for wide awake am I, and I like well the coolness of the dark."

"Well, ride with thee I will," said the Scot sourly, "but the shades upon us bode no good, to my way of thinking. Who might not leap forth from yon bushes and steal our gold?"

"Thou shouldst not carry gold," laughed Robin Hood.
"And if we see anyone I shall go ahead and blow my horn should I be in need of thy help, even as I always do when I set forth with my outlaw band for some adventure."

With this agreement the Scotchman was of lighter heart, and rode his horse half sleeping, knowing that the sensitive animal would follow the dark figure of Robin Hood's charger without guidance.

So it was that when Robin Hood reached the top of a high hill he saw a meadow lying between the hilltop and the next deeply wooded valley. It lay a silver square of moonlit grass, and resting here and there were the ghost-like forms of snowy sheep watched over by a drowsy shepherd.

"Stay behind me," whispered Robin Hood. "I have need of a refreshing drink and something to eat. If he sees two of us he may lift his voice and shout, suspecting some treachery. Hide here in the thickets, and do not come until I blow my horn."

This the Scotchman did, except that he fell promptly asleep against a tree trunk when the outlaw left him.

Robin Hood, leaving his charger behind him, limped slowly forward, saying to the alert shepherd, "All day have I walked. A weary traveler am I. What is in thy bag and bottle? Tell me, I prithee."

"What's that to thee, thou proud fellow? What, I repeat, hast thou to do with my bottle and bag? Let

me see thy command."

"My sword that hangeth by my side, conveniently near my hand, is that which orders thee," said Robin, straightening suddenly into a threatening figure.

"Dost thou think to frighten me," laughed the shepherd. "The devil a drop of this bottle shalt thou touch

until thou hast proved thy valor. Fight or flee."

"And thou in turn, thinkest thou to frighten me?" said Robin Hood. "What shall we fight for? Here is

twenty pounds in good red gold. Win it and take it with thee."

Then for the first time the shepherd showed some timidity. He peered into the stranger's face, but the shaft of moonlight had silvered Robin Hood's hair so that he looked old, and a new confidence came to the shepherd.

"I have naught but my bag and bottle to match thy

gold," he said proudly.

"And that is enough," laughed the outlaw, "for that is all I desire."

Then Robin Hood's sword and the shepherd's hook struck sharply at the same moment, and this was only the beginning of a fight that lasted some three long hours or more, while the Scotchman slept, dreaming of heather moors and forgetting to watch his new master. The stars twinkled, but Robin Hood saw them not. He saw not the silent, watching sheep who had wakened with the sharp clang of the metal and regarded their master with patient, wondering eyes. He saw not the shepherd, for that fellow wisely stood in shadow and only his low laughter as a thrust from the outlaw met thin air gave Robin Hood a cue as to where he stood. At last, when blood trickled into the great chief's eyes and when a sharp pain in his shoulder proclaimed one arm useless in combat, he cried for a boon.

"Thou hast won the twenty pounds, so be a man, and let him whom thou hast struck from the safety of thy shadowed position, blow three times upon a horn."

"Certainly, blow loudly. Thinkest thou I will flee? Nay, blow until morning, for we are on a high plateau and no human being lives within calling distance. Blow,

stranger, blow, and all that will happen will be the scattering of you white sheep."

Then Robin Hood blew his horn, and it was as the stranger said. The ghost-like figures of the lambs moved swiftly into the darkness beyond, and the world lay as quiet as before. At last, with one last despairing blast, Robin Hood prepared to kneel in humiliation before the shepherd. But out from the thicket came the sleepy, fat, anxious little Scotchman, ready for battle.

"And who can this be?" cried the shepherd in amazement. "I thought that none could hear. Stranger, didst thou drop from the clouds? Art thou a friend?"

"Not thine," cried the Scot. "I shall fight thee, bold fellow, for thou hast beaten my master, Robin Hood."

At the sound of the magic name, the shepherd drew back, but courageously set upon the other member of the famous outlaw band.

But after they had fought but a moment or two, Robin Hood cried "Hold," for he saw that the shepherd was weary in this second battle. And after all he had rightfully won the first.

"Hands off him, Sawney. And thou, brave fellow, wilt thou join my band? Leave the sheep and come to Sherwood Forest. Here there is only the sky and meadowland and thou alone with thy thoughts. There is a world of men as well as nature to amuse thee."

"Nay," said the shepherd shyly. "I could not leave them. In the presence of men I am but an awkward peasant boy. With the white sheep gathered about my knees I become a lord, a proud king with slaves before me, mute and wondering at my strength and command

over them. And when the storms come over us and the flaming lightning tries to destroy the helpless ones, I gather them in my arms even as the Christ did, and I know that I am of some value to the world."

"Sweet are thy words," smiled Robin Hood, while the Scot looked on in deep bewilderment. "Farewell. We shall never forget thee, for few have conquered Robin Hood, and thou didst win surely."

Then the shepherd, shamefaced, offered the two a drink from the bottle that had started the combat, and Robin Hood refused laughingly, but the Scot eagerly partook of his share.

"Farewell," the outlaws cried, as they rode off into the night.

"Farewell," came the gentle voice of the good shepherd.

"What was the nonsense the shepherd spake about the sheep thinking he was a king?" said the Scotchman scornfully.

"Ah," smiled Robin Hood, "every man must be a king, and the greater the subjects the greater is the ruler. You shepherd is majesty to a flock of sheep, and so thou judgest his kingship lightly. But tell me, friend, how like a flock of sheep are those who bow before the king of England!"

"I know not what thou art talking about," said the Scotchman impatiently.

"Well, thou art right. It is foolish to philosophize. No one understands thee. I meant, Sawney, that until the monarch of England lets his people do as they please and not follow blindly his laws, he will not be a great king ruling a great people."

"Thinkest thou the brother who seeketh the throne, it is said, will change the ways?" said the Scotchman.

"By heaven, no. John is a weakling, sprung from a brave tyrant whom he betrayed. The hope of England lieth in Richard, who is as much the strong-willed tyrant as his father Henry. But, praise be, Richard looks to a united England where his father wanted only another Normandy."

"Thinkest thou, then, the Saxons will be given rank again?" asked the Scot.

"Yea, for Richard wants a nation, and there can be no nation on this island unless the Saxons have a part in it. This the great king knows. It is folly for him to leave the country in the hands of John. He is at present, as thou knowest, in France, preparing to leave with Philip in a month or two for the Holy Land. All will be well should he return in safety in a year or less, but should he stay away from England for more than that, treachery and dishonor will rule the nation."

Again the ruddy Scotchman drowsed, his sandy head bent, his horse following unguided the way of Robin Hood's charger. And the outlaw chief smiled in sympathy, for had he not been so eager to look once more upon Little John and the fat Friar Tuck and Will Stutely and the dainty Scarlet, he, too, would have slept. But wishing to see them all, he spurred his horse onward, and when the dawn came he vigorously shook the Scotchman, crying:

"Awake, awake, fellow! Nottingham is yonder, and this is Sherwood. Follow me carefully through its dark corridors of woodland, and I will lead thee into the gayest company that has ever graced this earth." And laughing and shouting they galloped through the groves until suddenly Robin touched his lips for silence, and taking his horn, blew three clear musical blasts. To the listening ears of the newcomer, Sawney, came a surging, singing cry of welcome and the joyous words, "Our Master!"

ALLIN-A-DALE IS WED

At the sound of the distant shouting, Robin Hood dismounted from his horse and bade the Scotchman do likewise. Sawney became silent for once, shy of his new surroundings and rather in awe of the outlaw chief who ran forward to greet his company. Down hill the ribbon of path wound with innumerable twistings and turnings through the riot and tangle of undergrowth. The light of the sun was gone and the crusty Scotchman grumbled at the darkness, and when he stubbed his toe on a hidden rock, loud and indignant were his moans.

"Master, the shouting sounded so near. Where are we? Art thou lost?"

"What? Lost in Sherwood forest? Nay, I know its every stick and stone. To reach the outlaws we must go through this tangle which has been left for our further protection from those prying ones who may wish to catch a closer glimpse of Robin Hood. The voices came from but a short distance beyond this screen of underbrush."

It seemed to Sawney as if they had been plunged into an underground cave and were trusting to other senses than that of sight for guidance and direction. Painfully they felt their way. Then, suddenly, they reached the end of the long tunneled path, and, blinded by the brilliance of light, hid their eyes in their hands to bring back their vision. When they looked again, even the matterof-fact Scot caught his breath in wonder at the surpassing beauty of the scene unrolled before them. They stood on the edge of a cliff. A placid lake lay gleaming below like molten silver in the rays of the morning sun. Its shores were lined with fields of flowers, purple and scarlet and white. These sloped gently off to higher fields of dull-colored grain, brown and green and bright yellow most prettily contrasted. A herd of kine was gathered in the shade of spreading willows. Waterfowl moved sleepily about on the surface of clear ponds.

"Sawney," spoke the voice of Robin Hood, "I bid

thee thrice welcome to the Vale of Peace."

Then the great chief leaned over the edge of the dizzy precipice and called gayly down to the upturned faces of the yeomen far below him, "Hey day, all of ye, are ye ready with a banquet for your master? Faith, but it is good to see ye!"

It was the work of but a few minutes to scramble down the sheer face of the cliff. At first sight there did not seem to be any way of descent which would not lead straight to destruction, so steep and unhindered was the fall of the rocks to the floor of the valley a hundred paces below them. But Robin swarmed over the edge of the precipice as carelessly as if he trod on level ground.

"Marry, I go to meet my death," groaned Sawney. "Carry my purse, Master, and I will find it easier to follow thee."

Robin Hood laughed merrily and looked backward. He could scarce keep the tears back, so great was his merriment. He saw the fat Scot with one foot on a rough step made by a shelf of rock and the other lowered into mid-air. Tightly shut were his eyes, and screwed into a thousand wrinkles his red face. His sandy hair was

like an orange halo, blowing straight above his head as if it stood on end in fright.

"There is a dinner awaiting thee below, comrade," said Robin Hood cheerfully. Taking the Scot's hand, he led him carefully down to the safety of the level ground. Here the outlaws, without a glance at Sawney, clapped their master upon the back and gayly mothered him.

"Marry, but we missed thee sorely, coz," said Will Scarlet.

"Thou hast grown an inch, I do believe," smiled Little John, looking down from his great height.

"And gained a gray hair or two, I'll wager," laughed Robin Hood.

"Hath thy friend a fever?" interrupted the tactless Will Stutely, gazing with unconcealed joy at the scarlet, uncomfortable face of the Scotchman.

"May thy mockery put thee into difficulties, Will," answered Robin Hood. "Yon Scotchman is one whom I met upon my travels and found worthy to bring back with me."

"Thou meanest he is to be one of us?" asked Friar Tuck, measuring his own broad self in pantomine, and comparing himself to the stranger.

Then the Scot turned to Robin crossly. "Bring on the dinner thou spokest of. And tell you outlaws how I came to join thee. They may think better of me when they hear that."

Robin Hood made a wry face and launched into a description of his fight with the Scotchman. Instantly the outlaws lifted the pompous little fellow and dumped him into a placid pond, and all his conceit was thereby instantly drowned.

Then, since the new outlaw had been christened, they set about giving him the best that they had, and they all joined in the consuming of a great venison pasty. The Scot and Friar Tuck sat quite silent, each eying the other with distrust as he sent one huge mouthful following another into his capacious gullet in unending procession, and with never a pause in the march. But when the two saw that there was indeed enough for both of them they became quite friendly, and Friar Tuck began one of his ceaseless chatterings that none could make any sense or reason out of:

"Heyday," he rattled on, "here are tripes fit for our sport and in excellent godebillios of the dun deer, you know, with the black streak. Let us swallow them thriftily. Talk to me, dear Master, I beseech you. Sparrows will not eat unless you bob them on the tail, nor can I eat if I be not fairly spoken to by thee. Faith I have not eaten since thy departure, since thou couldst not speak with me."

Here he was interrupted by a loud roar of laughter from the outlaws and much nudging of one another which told Robin Hood that the fat friar had not done much starving in his absence.

"There is no corner in all my body where this pasty doth not ferret out my hunger. Ho, this piece will bang it soundly!" continued the little monk.

The Scotchman, after gazing first in scorn and then in bewilderment at the fellow, turned to Robin Hood in search of help.

"What is he talking about?" Sawney said impatiently. "He is as foolish in his speech as that shepherd we met."

Robin Hood and the others winked slyly at the Scotchman, and he soon saw that they paid no attention to the babblings of the friar and evidently did not regard them as of any importance. At last the meal came to a close, and the friar, after a sprightly dance or two, went off into the forest singing in a loud and churchish voice.

"Hear the booming bass of our friend," said Robin to Sawney. "There is a man that can make the welkin echo with his words when chanting the litany or preaching to the forest birds and wild game of Sherwood."

"What a foolish waste," said the Scotchman. "Why doth he not preach to living men?"

"I suppose, because he gets far better attention from dumb animals," laughed the irrepressible Will Stutely.

"What good is he, a priest, in a band of outlaws?" proceeded the skeptical Scot.

"Oh, there is many an office in our lives that demands a servant of the Holy Church. On saints' days 'tis a pleasing thought to know that proper words are being read in the greenwood chancel, whether one gains their meaning through the mazes of one's sleep or not. And the drone of a homing bee sets me to dozing no quicker than doth Tuck when he is reciting the breviary in his best manner. As an expounder of sacred writ none is more sly than he. He can fit the Bible to your needs as neatly as a tailor shapes a doublet."

"Well, that is indeed of value," laughed the Scotchman. "And I suppose he speeds the parting soul right merrily and makes of death a fairly pleasant matter."

"Yea, he holdeth funerals over the fallow deer before he puts them on to roast. He is a great convenience to us." "Master," the thin awkward Midge appeared from behind a great tree.

"Well, Midge, what is thy latest worry?" smiled the

outlaw chief.

"For two days I have watched a young man of surprising good looks walk the road that passes close to Sherwood."

"Doth he look worth robbing?" asked the Scot

practically.

"Silence," Robin Hood quieted him sternly. "If thou art to become an outlaw, Sawney, thou must not look always with avarice upon the passersby. If I read Midge rightly, he wisheth us to aid this fellow, not to bother him."

"Yes, Master," answered Midge eagerly. "I am worried about him. Each day he has passed with a song on his lips and with his head held high, as thou carriest thyself, Master," he ended in shy compliment.

"Thou art a good fellow, Midge," laughed Robin. "But why dost thou worry about thy young friend if

he weareth a smile?"

"But he weareth it no longer. He passed by an hour since, and his gay clothes fair hung upon him. I think he hath lost five stone over night. He drooped like a flower and sighed the most piteous sighs, and I fear some treachery attendeth him."

"We must look into the matter," said Robin Hood kindly. "Watch the road for the young fellow, Midge,

and call us should he approach again."

A day passed. Robin Hood talked gayly with his comrades, telling them of his adventures. They rejoiced to find him in this merry frame of mind instead of

in the mood of reverie that he had carried away with him. They eyed the Scot a little warily, but did their best to accustom themselves to his crusty manners, for Robin Hood had told them he had caught a glimpse of sweetness in the other's secretive nature.

The night brought a slight frost, and the outlaws began their plans for moving into the sandstone caves near Nottingham, where they stayed on the coldest nights of the winter. Robin did not sleep, but wandered happily among his comrades, pausing now to watch the fire flicker over the placid features of Friar Tuck, catching a glimpse of the sheer beauty of Will Scarlet's delicate and noble features and the homely comfortable countenance of freckled Will Stutely. Little John followed his master with his eyes, and could Robin Hood have surprised him in his gaze he would have been amazed at the depth of love and reverence there. At last the outlaw chief came to the side of Midge, and saw to his astonishment that the young boy had cried himself to sleep.

"Look thou, Little John," said Robin softly. "What sorrow doth this young sapling nurse? Traces of tears stain his ruddy cheek, and he weareth the sad, wan look of one who hath suffered before he slept."

"Yea," replied Little John, "Midge did not want to worry thee again, but the fellow who used to sing hath not passed the forest since the day he hung his head in misery, and this young lad of ours hath taken it quite to heart."

"Strange, indeed, are the natures of men," said Robin Hood gently. "Oftentimes these young colts grow long in limb and wear the look of manhood, yet they are such children in their hearts. And being children, they suffer needlessly, hiding their eyes like wet stars from those who long to comfort them. Tomorrow, Little John, take the lad and watch the road all day to see if thou canst encounter the stranger, and come to me at once if there is aught we can do for him. This is the first adventure of our Midge. So, if thou canst, let the discovery of the stranger's sorrow be the lad's own."

So the next day Little John and Midge watched the dusty highway. Many were the figures that met their eyes: all manner of beggars, some covered with sores, mostly self-inflicted, pretending to swellings of some kind and the need of money to carry them to St. Méen, in Brittany, where they could be cured; lame rogues with crutches, some with workmen's tools upon their backs which they never used, and old pensioners wearing their swords at their sides: hermits in black cowl and hood: canons in dark cassocks and nuns in white: heralds clad in the gay insignia of their office; goatherds and shepherds in dusty brown, often playing upon pipe, horn, or even the bagpipe; minstrels in their funny flat shoes proper to their profession, short capes, and hoods far back on their close-clipped hair framing their shaven impish faces; and the occasional dust-cloud accompanying a party of knights on the way to some distant tournament.

Suddenly Midge drew a long quivering breath and pointed to a figure coming slowly along the road. Little John saw a handsome, delicately-molded face, downcast and frightened, and a lithe figure bent as if it carried a heavy weight.

The outlaws drew near the boy just in time to hear him say with a deep sigh, "Alack and well-a-day!"

"Hold!" cried Little John. And the young man jumped with fright, for he had been in another world and had seen not the strangers approaching him. His head lifted proudly and he pulled himself together, saying:

"What is your will with me? Stand off! I know

not what ye wish with me."

"Thou must come before our master under yon greenwood tree."

"By heaven, I have fallen into Robin Hood's hands!" moaned the young man. "Trouble—naught but trouble. But no further harm can come to me, so great is the harm already besetting me," he added gloomily, and followed them without a word.

Then Robin Hood saw them coming—Midge, racing ahead, filled with excitement and sympathy, Little John playing the part of the mysterious outlaw well, and the stranger, a lovely graceful figure with brooding eyes and a tragic mouth.

"Oh, hast thou any money to spare for my merry men and me?" asked Robin Hood, keeping up the pretense of highway robbery.

"I have no money," the young man said in an expressionless voice, "save five shillings and a ring that I have kept this seven long years for my wedding day."

"What is thy name?" asked Robin Hood. And as the stranger lifted his eyes to answer, the master smiled upon him, and the words the boy made in reply were no longer said listlessly. They fairly tumbled out in their eagerness, for he had read the sympathy in Robin Hood's face.

"My name is Allin-a-Dale. Alone am I in the world, for my father lost his life in Normandy fighting for the

king and my mother left me when I was but a babe. But there came to fill my loneliness a lovely maiden. Long have I loved her, and yesterday I should have married her, but from me she was taken. Her father, who loveth gold, gave her to be an old knight's delight in payment for a handful of jewels. And now she sobs on this, her wedding day, and I stumble blindly along the highway, trusting some knave to slay my body since my poor heart is slain already."

"What wilt thou give me," said Robin Hood, "to help thee to thy true love again and deliver her unto thee in

holy wedlock?"

"My everlasting loyalty, for I have no money," said the boy. "And Laurel, for so my bride is called, will come with me often to the greenwood to kneel before thee and give thanks."

"Where is the church?" asked Robin Hood.

"St. Mary's church in Nottingham, Sire. The bishop of Hereford is going to wed them, I am told. The old knight is a usurer and by right should be denied by the church law the sacraments, the singing of the mass, and other ceremonies that shall solemnize the wedding. But he hath bribed the bishop to marry them, opening the door of God's church with his keys of gold."

"Ah, I am to meet with my third enemy at last," said Robin grimly, and Little John knew that his master was remembering a talk of long ago when he had been told that the sheriff, Sir Guy of Gisborne, and the bishop of Hereford were his foes.

Then Robin arranged that the outlaws, accompanied by Allin-a-Dale, should follow him, and that he should go forth alone, trusting to his wits to save two lives from eternal misery. He reached the church before the ceremony had begun and went straightway to the bishop, a white-haired ecclesiastic with a pair of hard, watery blue eyes and a mouth with lips so thin and tightly held together they could not but be expressionless.

"Who art thou? What dost thou wish, I prithee?" said the bishop pompously, though his heart beat with fear, for the task of wedding a usurer was attended with some danger. With the old knight's generous bribe in his pocket, he longed now to tie the knot and hurry away, and until this was done all strangers were viewed with suspicion.

"I am a bold harper," quoth Robin Hood, "and the best in the north country. I can lend a low sweet accompaniment to thy words that shall give fiber to thy tones, and lo, my music shall be thought to be the music of thine own voice."

"Oh, welcome, welcome, then! Though my voice needeth little help, perchance in contrast to thy harp its beauty will show off the better," said the bishop nervously, for he was indeed relieved to find this intruding fellow only a simple harpist.

"Thou shalt have no music till I see the bride and bridegroom," said Robin stubbornly.

"Why, what a curious fellow thou art," laughed the bishop. "Here they are at this very moment. Are they good enough for thee?"

And when the bishop cast his eyes upon the usurer, he remembered with a slight shudder a tale he had heard of a certain usurer who had gone to celebrate his wedding at a parish church of the Blessed Virgin in Dijon. And as he and his bride stood beneath the portal they had

unlawfully entered, an image carved in stone above the doorway, showing a usurer being carried away by a carven devil to Hell, fell with his stone money bags upon the head of the living usurer and crushed him to death, so that the wedding was changed into lamentation and mourning.

Robin saw approaching a frail and stunted figure that he knew must be the old and wealthy knight. The aged man was entirely bald, and the wrinkles that had so contorted his face that it looked like a wizened monkey's had shrunk his hands and body also. The bride had turned her sweet face away from him. Her features were fine, and an elusive charm of the spirit had changed her mere prettiness into a lovely madonna-like beauty. Robin Hood's heart throbbed with pity as he saw her bow her golden head as they passed the statue of the Virgin, and he knew that her heart had offered a last despairing cry for help to the Lady gazing down at her.

"Sweet Mary hath sent me to your aid," Robin Hood whispered to her as she passed. She lifted her lovely, startled eyes, but saw no one but a sneering bishop before her, and a poorly dressed harper playing a joyless melody.

"Courage!" the voice whispered. But she thought it was the wind in the trees or the wild fancy of her weary mind.

"This is not a fit match," a loud voice cried, and all the church looked in amazement at the tall figure of the harper who had come forth and was facing the groom with flashing eyes. "The bride shall choose her own love," he cried, and lifting a horn to his mouth, he blew three haunting notes. The bishop quivered with rage, but he knew now that Robin Hood had come into the sanctuary and he dared not lift a voice lest he be killed. He saw some twenty or more bowmen surround the church, and straightway down the aisle came one of them, a laughing youth with handsome features, who seemed to devour the bride with his eyes, which were wide with wonder and adoration.

"Whom dost thou choose, lovely lady?" smiled Robin Hood.

And the bride, swaying a little, turned her flower-like face to Allin-a-Dale, the while her tremulous voice murmured his name; and his words merged with hers as he whispered, "Dearest Laurel."

"They cannot be married, for the bans have not been published three times, and that is the law. Yea, thrice in the church must be ask for her."

Robin Hood pulled off the bishop's coat and put it on Friar Tuck, whose arms hung far down from the sleeves and whose great feet protruded unbecomingly from beneath the skirt.

"This cloth maketh thee a bishop, Friar Tuck," said Robin Hood, "for as yet I have found no bishop who differs from ordinary man under the skin."

The outlaws joined in the choir, over which hung a great candelabra fashioned of gold and silver with one hundred candles whose pointed flames were no more vivid than the jewels adorning them. And all the people in the church laughed a little in relief that they hadn't been killed, and Allin-a-Dale, in a loud and fervent voice, asked seven times for his bride lest three be not enough.

"Who giveth this maid?" asked Friar Tuck.

"I do," cried Robin Hood and the enthusiastic Midge in chorus.

"And he that taketh her from Allin-a-Dale shall buy her dearly," added Friar Tuck.

Then tying the bishop and the guests to the trees near the little church, the outlaws slipped away like forest deer, and Allin-a-Dale and sweet Laurel were among them, safely guarded should there be pursuit. But no one dared to follow them, and when the sun went down that night, Friar Tuck held a vesper service in thanksgiving to the Virgin for saving the two from a plight that would have been far worse than death.

"Happy, Midge?" asked Robin Hood.

"Yea, Master," said the boy shyly. "But, Robin, I could not have given to Allin-a-Dale this great joy had it not been for thee," he added modestly.

Book the Fourth



WINTER-BOUND IN THE CAVES

A SORRY RESCUE

More than once Robin Hood had wondered about the charming young Roger de Lacy with whom he had stayed on his memorable tournament day in Nottingham. The indolent fellow's amazing love for the lovely Lady Marian Fitzwalter had caught his fancy, and he wondered if that lady had deigned to make the young lord any happier. With memories of these two romantic figures came the poignant picture of old Lord Hugh. Robin heard again the dreamy voice intrusting him with the secret message to be given to Maid Marian should he not return: I lie with Iseult's dust 'neath Shrovetide yew. What could it mean? Did a treasure lie hidden in some corner of the royal garden at Nottingham Castle, or did some great yew tree on Lord Hugh's estate at Dallom Lea shelter a hiding place beneath its boughs? The outlaw made up his mind to skirt the grounds of that castle on a dark night and see what he could find. He did not put into words a secret longing to look once more upon the vivacious face of a certain lady there.

Will Scarlet was more open in his thoughts regarding her. He went for days from adventure to adventure, wholly wrapped up in his forest life and content to recall his encounter with Maid Marian by telling the other outlaws about it. But now that winter approached and they made ready to leave the pleasant forest for the

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more confining limits of the caves, Will became moody and restless and thought very seriously of returning to his father in Maxwell town, since he had been forgiven by the regent John for the slaying of Lord Gamwell's spying servant and could no longer be held for that misdemeanor. Here as a young lord he could don royal garments and come to ask for admittance to the presence of Lady Marian.

"Master," he cried frankly, "the summer is past, and I know not my powers of endurance. Perchance I would not like a winter in the open. I desire the company of noble personages. True, there could be none more noble than thou, coz, but I mean those that care to proclaim their nobility with display. I can help this love for show no more than thou canst help thy devotion to Our Lady."

Robin Hood listened kindly. None understood more clearly than he a desire to change one's ways of living from time to time. But he felt that Will Scarlet would find but little joy in Maxwell town after the freedom of Sherwood Forest, and he hated to see him leave. So he considered the matter aloud with Will, hoping that his cousin would not think him to be overstepping his bounds as master.

"I do sympathize with thee, Will. Often thou hast spoken of the Lady Fitzwalter, and I have long suspected thee of hiding beneath thy banter more than an ordinary affection. I think, however, that if thou returnest to Maxwell town and becomest once more the gay and indolent idler, all the glamor that attendeth thee since thy marvelous victory over the guards of the Moorish prince will be taken from thee. Thou wilt be no more

than a Roger de Lacy, charming, certainly, beautiful to look upon, but no different from a hundred other brave knights who daily desire the acquaintance of the Lady Marian."

"But at least they have daily attendance upon her," answered Will Scarlet glumly, "and I have not looked upon her since the fateful hour of the tournament when she gave me the bit of scarlet ribbon she wore in her hair."

If Robin Hood felt any pain at this rival interest in the lovely lady of Nottingham, he gave no sign of it. He continued to think entirely of how the matter concerned his cousin.

"I will let thee go, of course, Will, as soon as thou desirest to, but come today with us to look over the sandstone caves on the northern escarpment of the Leen, or those on both sides of Castle Rock, and then decide as to whether thou wilt winter with the outlaws of Robin Hood."

So, early in the day, the whole band of merry men set forth. Some were in Lincoln green and others in disguise, for, like children at play, they loved to dress up in costumes of the nobility. And they were as excited as pioneers following a trail to unknown wildernesses, for many had never investigated Castle Rock, which was honeycombed with hollows ideal for dwelling places, with long passages leading from cave to cave. On different levels, both sides of the rock were dotted with dark openings which led into high-roofed grottoes and low caverns that were spacious as well as close and secretive. Many of the excavations had been enlarged by human hands, as the hollowing of the sandstone was not difficult, and it was this that Robin Hood's band were prepared to

do that the winter encampment might be large enough for all.

Friar Tuck talked importantly of the chapel that he must have:

"I'faith, Master, never yet have I had a roof over my head to say mass to you outlaws, so the first cave that you find that will hold us all must be for me—unless it be the refectory," he added quickly.

And now Robin Hood told the outlaws that there were two possible situations for their winter camp. The one that he had occupied with a few of his men one other time was nearly beneath the great castle of Nottingham, and a secret passage led from it into the dungeons of the castle. Now that the band had increased, however, Robin Hood hardly dared to choose their home in the immediate vicinity of the enemy, and suggested that they go to the "Popish Holes" near Nottingham and on the river Leen. So they reached this massive perpendicular rock with its ledges broad enough for a man to walk easily upon, and soon peered furtively into arched doorways that seemed to lead into subterranean caverns and grottoes.

"By my faith, 'tis a chapel," came the muffled voice of Friar Tuck.

They rushed to him and found, to their utter amazement, that indeed these caves had been tenanted before, and Robin Hood told them the story went that years before, Romans had had a monastery there. Here was an altar roughly hewn from a natural rock. A single Roman column still adorned one wall, and the inside of the cave seemed to have been washed with a thin plaster upon which mosaic devices had been painted in various

colors. While Friar Tuck hummed a little tune of excitement as he dashed into crevice and corner, Robin and the others climbed higher and sought new openings.

"The river maketh an excellent fortification," said Little John. "See how it curveth to meet both ends of the cliff. And the ledges of rock so hide the openings they will be like garden walls protecting us from any scurvy Norman who may come this way to spy."

For the next few days, the outlaws engaged in a work so fascinating that they stopped only to eat and sleep, and they found that the labor Robin Hood had set them was indeed better than play. Each outlaw had his special task in the preparation of the winter camp. Some made ladders to communicate with the upper stories of the cavern. Where the openings of the grottoes were too large, they were partly walled up to keep out the icy winter winds, and great was the amusement of the outlaws when they discovered Midge, the impractical, trying to make a balcony.

"Thinkest thou we wish to sit in the open to watch the river freeze?" laughed Will Stutely. "Come, thou silly, and help me make round holes in the red stone into which we shall put little branches that will hold shelves. We cannot have a kitchen without a cupboard, while a balcony—oh, thou wilt be the death of me!"

Will Scarlet forgot all about going back to Maxwell town, so delighted was he at one cave near the river bed which was so moist that green vines had grown in all the cracks, turning the grotto into a leafy bower. "It is a bit of Sherwood transplanted," he said happily.

Little John bored holes high in the sides of the walls and put rods in them which projected out some distance. On these were hung those vegetables that should not come in contact with the damp ground, and also the wardrobes which the outlaws used for disguise, which, of course, came from the backs of real royalty who had not behaved in a proper manner. One great grotto was to be the barnyard, and painfully they all labored to prepare mangers for the cattle and hollowed from the stone great bins to contain the fodder. Those caves nearer the open face of the cliff contained fireplaces in convenient niches of the caverns, and above them were holes bored through several feet of rock in a slanting direction, forming shafts to let out the smoke. Circular orifices were cut to act as windows and most of them were covered with sheets of thin horn.

And now it was nearly finished, though of course there was enough to busy the outlaws all winter in the cutting of small niches for lamps and in the slow process of carving steps and arches. They ran like merry children through the labyrinths, exploring by the light of feeble candles. Down descending passages into long galleries and little cells, up ascending corridors that led miraculously to daylight, and whose steps wound into sky chambers where showed the fiber roots of trees hanging through the rock in twisted snake-like clusters.

"See, brethren, that ye do not lose yourselves in these perilous chambers," warned Robin Hood. "Safe are we from those who may wish us harm, for they may as well seek an eagle in his eyrie high among the clouds, but remember ye that the rooms that ye have furnished for our camp are not the only rooms within this honeycomb. Sinuous passages will entice you to follow them, but do not go unless you mark with a piece of chalk each new cavern that you enter, or else join hands or spread yourselves so that always the voice of the leader is heard as well as the voice of the guard that remaineth in a familiar cavern."

"We shall hold the Yuletide service in the chapel," said Friar Tuck happily. "I'faith, though, I wish that our little church had more of those ornaments and properties without which the divine mysteries and ministries of God's service cannot gracefully stand; chalices, candelabra, thuribles, chrism-vases, crewets, shrines, or missals. And though yon walls are better than rough rock, if there were only aureoles illumining them, vivid as bright shawls from far-away Cathay. And see yon arches empty of adornment. I cannot feel the proper desire to preach fervently the gospel with no wicked gargoyles looking down on me, smiling with human lips yet swirling their serpent tails, worshiping with human eyes and defying me by kicking their goatish hoofs."

"Yea," said Will Stutely mischievously, "when the litany is too long, nothing is nicer than a fierce statue of a lion to gaze upon, or a hunter winding his horn."

"Silence, rascal," smiled Robin Hood. But his heart was truly sore within him, for no image of the Virgin graced their little chapel, and how else could he find one save to steal from the House of God, which could not be considered?

"This sandstone is easily shaped," suggested Midge shylv. "Perchance one of us—"

"Oh, if there be any with sensitive fingers, bring him forward," cried Friar Tuck, understanding at once what the boy suggested. "Let us all while our time away from now till Yuletide by a play at carving in our idle moments.

Then, the night before Noël, we shall build anew the little chapel, filling it with emblems of ecclesiastical adornment."

"And let us work in secret," said Little John, "for then no laughter will discourage our attempts, and any image unworthy of the chapel need never meet the eye of others."

Robin Hood smiled upon them joyously, for well he liked their spirit of ambition.

"And those who find that the art of carving lieth not in their fingertips may turn to other tasks. Ye who have a blacksmith's training, turn your apprenticeship to good use and hammer forth the candelabras, trees of iron or bronze to hold the snowy tapers. And the floor might well be leveled and lined in the shape of crowns and scepters. A month till Christmas! Make it a month of miracles, dear comrades."

Then each man formed a secret plan, and some found good fairies in their fingertips, while others threw down the pieces of sandstone in anger and turned to more practical tasks.

Alone in his little cell in the depths of the great rock worked Robin Hood. And he found that a vision engraved in his heart many years ago in the cathedral at Chartres came again into being beneath his sensitive fingertips. How his heart throbbed as he fashioned the sweet eyes of his Lady! How he prayed as he smoothed her brow into a lovely serenity! Fascinated, he watched her come before him. And the outlaws wondered what their master had attempted to create for the little chapel. Some thought that he labored at a forge in the privacy of his cell, and others imagined that he would contribute

naught, for, after all, had he not contributed it all by leading them to the secret place? And he told no one, as Little John had suggested, but often he wanted to shout boyishly, "Look, look, all of ye, what I have done!"

Then came a day when he strove to recreate the Virgin's magic smile. But his mind saw only an elusive curving mouth, now tragic in its wistfulness and then again the very essence of a living mirth. A drooping sadness the outlaw found his image of the Virgin had, and swiftly he erased his work, for had not his Lady told him to be gay? Passionately he began again, and found to his horror he had turned her curving lips into a sneer. He buried his face in his hands. The confinement of the little cell began to tell upon him. He paced like a caged animal between its narrow bounds. Just six more days till Christmas, and the lovely image that he had created was doomed to failure because of one marring touch. Her eyes were true. There was the delicate curving of her pointed chin, the sweep of her peaceful brow. He ran from the cell in misery, praying to forget her, she so haunted him.

"Ah, Master, thou hast come upon us just in time," he heard in the gay voice of Will Scarlet. "I have seen my old friend Roger de Lacy, as saucy a fellow as ever. He was quite flushed with victory, for this day he rideth with the Lady Marian."

"And why have I come in time? In time for what, coz?" asked Robin Hood.

"Why, we are going to give the Lady Fitzwalter and Sir Roger a fright—come upon them of a sudden from a projecting rock and, clad in dazzling Lincoln green, make them indeed aware of us." "Thinkest thou the lady will think well of thee?" asked Robin Hood.

"Indeed, coz, thou toldest me thyself she felt a certain

glamor about the outlaw band."

"Very well. Go thou and play, but harm not a hair of the damsel's head," Robin Hood answered with a preoccupied air.

"But art thou not coming with us?" Will Scarlet's

voice was filled with amazement.

"Nay, I feel not in the mood for play."

The outlaws wondered a little at their master's disinclination to join in an adventure, for it had been long since they had played a prank on clergy or nobility.

The little party in Lincoln green led their horses from the cavern closest to the ground, down the winding path that led around to the other side of the great protected rock, and thence to a prairie. Robin Hood stood on a high ledge close to the sky, watching the River Leen, a purple sinuous rope cutting them off from the surrounding countryside, the deep burnt umber of late afternoon, and the black trees of the distance. He saw his cousin, Will Scarlet, and seven other laughing outlaws start to ride slowly off toward Castle Rock, for it was from there Maid Marian and Roger de Lacy were almost sure to start on their canter.

Suddenly the outlaw chief smiled. Laughter shook his broad shoulders, gleamed in the high lights of his blue eyes. He ran into the cave nearest him and whispered into one of the outlaw's ears, who in turn broke into hilarious chuckles. He spoke in like manner to ten others, all of whom joined him in his laughter. Then Robin Hood and the eleven outlaws disappeared into the

grotto that Little John had spent a good half day turning into a wardrobe closet. From the dank walls of the cavern rods stood forth, and on them hung velvet robes, monks' cowls, beggars' rags, while the shining mail that knights wore lay on benches, heavy and ponderous. Robin and his little company arrayed themselves in the linked armor, pulling the steel visors well down over their faces.

"Where art thou going?" asked Will Stutely, bursting

with curiosity.

"Is there to be a battle, Master?" cried Midge eagerly.

But Robin Hood only smiled inscrutably and shrugged his graceful shoulders.

Now all the outlaws left behind stood on the perilous ledges, so high on the sandstone rock a human figure could not be seen from below, and putting their hands to their eyes, sailor fashion, they watched Robin Hood and his men gallop off toward Nottingham Castle until they were only a distant blot of silver on the horizon, like the great silver moths that inhabited the darkest caverns of their winter camp.

* * *

The Lady Fitzwalter galloped her horse recklessly along the road, her pretty head bent as she passed beneath great barren branches overhanging the ground. Behind her the lazy Sir Roger shouted, "I'faith, Maid Marian, what thinkest thou this is, a tournament? Marry, I shall be unhorsed at any moment, and then who will protect thee if we meet Robin Hood?"

"Ho, thinkest thou thy protection would frighten him away?" she caroled back at him. Then reining in her

prancing steed, she regarded him with wide eyes, soft and deep lashed, tenderly mocking. "I wager, De Lacy, that if thou seest an outlaw thou wilt gallop then, faster than the wind, swifter than a deer."

"Nay, I would never run away," asserted the gay young lord, "unless," he added quizzically, "thou wouldst run with me."

"Oh, thou dost beg the issue! I am all but angry with thee. Why dost thou not assert thyself? Hold thy head high and wear a broad chest and carry thyself like a commander."

"But whom could I command?" the crestfallen De Lacy murmured.

"Why, that is the trouble. One who wishes to command finds followers easily. Take me, for instance—"

"What, sweet?" he cried joyously. "Is it that I may command thy heart?"

"Oh, oh," she flushed vividly and tossed her head. "Thou wilt be the death of me. I meant, of course, take me as an example of one who commands. See how I order my father's estate and see that the wily Sir Guy of Gisborne does not simply help himself to it."

"Indeed, thou hast done well," said De Lacy meekly. But he almost spoke to her of gossip he had heard of how her father already owed Sir Guy vast sums, so that after all the taking of Lord Fitzwalter's estate would not be a matter of helping one's self, but merely the forfeit for a debt incurred. If she had not regarded him with utter impatience he might have cautiously advanced this hint, but he was greatly afraid of angering her, and he had found that dark sleepless nights for him always attended such a situation.

"I sometimes wish I could have been a man," she said softly, her winged mouth drooping.

"But what a waste of starry eyes and ivory skin,"

murmured De Lacy.

She regarded him haughtily, but he looked so frightened she could not but smile at him.

"Thou art something of a comfort, friend. Thou makest me feel beautiful, and that is medicine for a lady whose heart is sad and lonely."

"Thou art lovely as love itself," he whispered.

"But I know naught of love, so thy phrase is unfortunate," she teased him.

"May thy heart never know it," he said moodily.

"What, Sir Roger! Thou wouldst have me enter a nunnery?" she opened her eyes wide.

"Nay, but love is whispered vows without fulfillment. Love is a white bird singing a song of pain without a mate to answer."

She regarded him, half frightened, her hand against her slim white throat, but she had no chance to ask him what he meant, if he were but teasing her again, or singing some troubadour's refrains. Suddenly, through the avenues of the leafless trees they saw approaching masked outlaws in Lincoln green. Swiftly they came, their horses forming a great V, ready, it seemed, to attack.

"Away, my sweet," De Lacy breathed beneath the cover of a great cloak he had thrown over his head. "Their arrows cannot hurt me with this thing about me, and I shall stop their progress after thee if it be over my dead body."

"Speak not so foolishly," laughed Maid Marian nervously. "Thou knowest that Robin Hood doth not

kill or do any lasting harm. Thou lookest like an old woman with a shawl about thee. Quickly, take it away and show off thy pretty face. Thou really art handsome." She spoke a little cruelly, but De Lacy understood she scarcely knew what she was saying, for, proud lady that she was, she did not wish to seem distressed or cowardly at this attack upon them, and yet her heart must have beat the faster.

Then the outlaws surrounded them without saying a word, and she eyed them like a true patrician, with a quirk of humor about her shapely mouth but a cold hauteur in her manner.

"Is this a game?" she asked.

"Exactly. A game of old acquaintances, my lady," answered Will Scarlet, pulling his mask from his laughing eyes.

But she did not smile at him at once, for she remembered with a rush of shyness how on her last meeting with this fellow she had given him her scarlet ribbon for a token.

"I have no acquaintance with an outlaw," she said coldly.

Will Scarlet flushed uncomfortably. Stammering in his effort to apologize, he turned from her disdainful presence. But before he had signaled the other outlaws to depart, the pounding of galloping horses' hoofs reached his ears. Scarce had he turned to see what it was, when a group of knights in shining mail were full upon them, running their silver spears all but into the men in green before they could pull back the runaway steeds. The horses sank back upon their haunches, their teeth gleaming fiercely through the white foam at their mouths. A

lifted hand from one of the knights, a low murmur of his voice, and the amazed outlaws recognized their master. They fled to the rocks that lined the roadside, hiding behind them as they had been signaled to do by Robin Hood.

"Oh, oh, who art thou?" stormed Lady Fitzwalter, "spoiling my adventure!"

"But, lady, these are the rough outlaws of one Robin Hood attacking thee," said the leader of the party of knights falteringly.

"Robin Hood is not rough," was all she answered, haughtily.

Then Robin Hood, who had led this little band of disguised outlaws to the rescue of Maid Marian in order to tease Will Scarlet, flushed and looked away from the lady's disappointed mouth. She was like a child who has had a lovely present taken from her. The outlaw swallowed in humiliation. His eyes met those of Friar Tuck, whose round, fat face peered over one of the rocks by the road. The head peered higher and Robin Hood saw a wide grin on his comrade's features.

"Who art thou? Thy voice soundeth strangely familiar," said De Lacy, trying to see past the steel visor hiding the knight's features.

"Why, Sir Roger," said Lady Fitzwalter, "I knew his voice was familiar too. I do believe he is that foolish fellow who stayed with thee when he was but an esquire. Thou rememberest, he came with us to that tournament fought on the day of Earl John's banquet—he who got frightened away when Robin Hood's outlaws galloped upon us in the lists. And now thou art a knight and acting as clumsily as ever," she said scornfully.

Robin Hood looked at her almost as pleadingly as did De Lacy when he was being chided, for more than twenty of the outlaw band were listening with all their ears to the words that were flung at their master by the queenly maiden. When he got home how they would tease him for rescuing a lady who did not wish to be rescued!

"Now, what was thy name," Maid Marian said mischievously, wrinkling her fair brow with exaggerated thoughtfulness, "—Gilbert, was it, or Robert, or—"

"Brian de Furneaux," said Robin Hood stiffly.

"Well, go thy way," she smiled. "After all, I suppose thou didst think to help me, but I could indeed box thine ears for spoiling my adventure. Why, I have even ridden alone near Sherwood Forest," she said in a triumphant whisper, "hoping to lay eyes upon that marvelous human Robin. And who knows, Will Scarlet might have captured me hadst thou not interfered, and perchance have taken me to his chief's hiding place."

"By the good St. Dunstan," cried Roger de Lacy, "this newly fledged knight hath at least guarded thee from thy reckless folly. Thou art good for something after all, young fellow." He leaned forward impudently and gave Robin Hood's horse a playful fleck with his whip.

The sensitive charger reared. Its rider quieted it with a swift, gentle caress. Then turning toward Sir Roger, he put his hand on his sword menacingly. Beneath the helmet his blue eyes matched the flashing steel. De Lacy drew back in wonder. Lady Marian caught her breath at the dominating bearing of one whom she thought to be only a blundering young squire newly turned knight. As she saw his slender body, quivering

with anger, taut with expectancy, she had the curious feeling that this was a man indeed. Could the rôle of awkward youth have been only a disguise? She remembered with increased bewilderment how she had been drawn to the young squire against her will on the occasion of King John's ball at Nottingham Castle. How strange that he had been near her both those times when she had encountered followers of the mysterious Robin Hood! Could he be one of the king's men seeking the outlaw chief and trying to catch him away from his lair? A glow of admiration mingled with her fear lest he be an enemy of her hero. How gracefully he sat his horse. quieting it with a composed hand, a kind murmuring of some strange language known only to man and horse who are comrades! No. she really believed that he was not young after all. One never could tell, when the costume of young and old was alike. She had judged him as he had wished her to judge him, by his idle and youthful chatter. Now she read him by his eyes, deep and full of patience and sympathy.

"I bid thee farewell," she said coldly. "The outlaws have scurried away like frightened hares. Continue thy journey. And I thank thee," she added graciously.

There was naught to be done but to turn away. The other knights galloped on, but Robin Hood lingered a little. Turning back he saw that the outlaws had crept back and regained their horses, but were rapidly disappearing in the opposite direction, for of course they had recognized Robin Hood and they dared not continue their adventure further lest it displease him. As Robin Hood watched, he saw Will Scarlet gallop back to Lady Fitzwalter. The outlaw tore the peacock's

feather from one of his arrows and bowing low to Maid Marian, cried, "My token, fair lady!"

Maid Marian looked long and earnestly at the fair young man before her, his pleading eyes, sparkling with youth and excitement, his noble bearing—for was he not truly the son of Lord Gamwell of Maxwell town until he ran away to be an outlaw in Robin Hood's band? She lifted the peacock feather to her lips and stretching forth her slim white arm let the green-blue tuft go in the breeze. It was as if she said goodby to gay Will Scarlet as she sent the tiny feather away into the sky. Will Scarlet took his dismissal gracefully, waving his hand to her and galloping off in the direction the wind had carried the feather.

"Why did you do that?" inquired De Lacy with a puzzled glance.

"It is the feather from Robin Hood's arrow I desire to be my token," she said softly.

"But thou hast never seen him," De Lacy cried in wonder.

A look of infinite sadness came over her sweet face, and she said in frightened bewilderment, "Love is a white bird singing a song of pain without a mate to answer."

Roger de Lacy looked at her with a drawn face, horrified eyes.

"Hush, sweet, thou knowest not what thou art saying. Thou must not nurse a wayward love for Robin Hood. He may be naught but a rogue of the highways, an old man hiding in some tunneled cave. Or perhaps he lives not at all, but is only a name that the gay Will Scarlet and his like have conjured up to protect their outlawry."

"Hush, thyself," she cried petulantly. "Why should I not love the favorite hero of my childhood dreams? And he does live, for long ago I rode upon his shoulder."

Robin Hood turned his charger away toward the purple hills that hid his outlaw castle. He let the horse find its way without guidance. Eyes closed, he engraved upon his mind's eye the lovely winged mouth of Marian, regrets molding its corners into her first real sadness, and yet an elusive light of joy playing in her expression, born of the mystery of love—her lips like other lips engraved upon his heart so long ago. On, on, prancing charger, he urged recklessly, eagerly, for his slender fingers longed to touch once more the smooth stone, to find reality in the wonder that his eyes had seen. The lovely mouth of Lady Marian and that of the mysterious Virgin of Chartres were the same.

CHRISTMAS AND THE GOSPEL OF SILVER MARKS

Bring us in no eggs, for there are many shells, But bring us in good ale, and give us nothing else. Bring us in no bacon for that is passing fat, But bring us in good ale and give us enough of that.

And bring us in good ale, and bring us in good ale For our blessed Lady's sake, bring us in good ale.

This was the rude chorus that awoke Robin Hood on Christmas morning. Already the caves were fragrant with the cooking of roast boar, geese, and spicy delicacies. All the outlaws worked over the Christmas dinner. Fires roared in every fireplace, and the dark caves turned ruddy in the light. Only when they walked in the outer corridors could the outlaws hear the winter wind howling mournfully and weirdly as it beat against the great rock projecting to the sky.

Robin Hood followed the winding labyrinths to the topmost cave. Here on a narrow, slippery ledge he perched like an eagle. Each day he climbed to this lookout without telling anyone, that he might see far over the countryside and spy any enemy that might have heard of the outlaw's new camp and decided to burn him out of his hole. But it was Christmas day, and all the land about Nottingham lay quiet and peaceful. The river, a ribbon of blue-gray ice, might be the scene of games later in the day, but now there was no one abroad. Robin Hood felt as if he were the only man alive.

Coming down again to the great dining hall, he found Midge and the friar painfully trying to prepare a goose for the oven.

"Hear thou, Midge, a tale of a young anchorite who was brought up from childhood in a hermitage and saw no one but the abbot who taught him his prayers. One day the abbot took the boy to the city. Seeing some women dancing together, he inquired earnestly of the abbot what they might be. 'They are geese,' quoth he. When the young anchorite returned he wept. 'What wouldst thou, my son?' said the abbot. 'Father, I would fain eat of those geese I saw in the city." The friar laughed loudly, and Midge looked at him in amazement.

"I cannot see the joke, Friar Tuck."

Here all the outlaws laughed long and heartily, for often the friar's jokes were not very funny and no one ever dared tell him so. But, on the other hand, poor Midge was noted for never finding the point, no matter how clear it might be.

"They are an ideal couple to converse," chuckled Will Stutely.

"There is only one thing missing from our Christmas," said Little John thoughtfully.

"And what is that?" they all cried.

"Mass in our little chapel. Could we not get the Bishop of Hereford here by some strategy and have some play with him, and then make him sing us a mass?" Little John asked.

"Why couldn't it be done?" They turned eagerly to

Robin Hood.

"Yea, it can be. I have not met the Bishop of Hereford for some time, and it may be easier to entertain him lavishly in our winter camp than in our summer home," laughed Robin Hood. "Mass will soon be over in the church of St. Mary's at Nottingham. The bishop travels to the castle afterward, I suppose. Let us go and meet him on his way."

Forth they started, all in their Lincoln green, clapping their hands to keep them warm and running over the frosty ground in the direction of Nottingham Castle. As they drew near the village Robin Hood stopped them.

"I'faith, it is harder to play in the winter time. There are no green thickets to hide in. Let us not bring trouble upon ourselves this Christmas day. Go, brothers, into the caves of Castle Rock and I shall go on alone. Trust me to bring the bishop near enough to the caves so that when I blow my horn all you will have to do will be to rush upon him and force him to run all the way to our home."

But Robin Hood felt some misgiving as he walked along the hard frozen road. Nearing the town, he found that all of the villagers either were inside their cozy little cottages or else still in the church hearing the Christmas service. Passing a little gray house, the outlaw darted to its doorstep and called loudly.

"Ho, I prithee, let me in out of this cold on the day of our Savior's birth!"

The door opened a crack, and an old wife peered out at him fearfully.

"Good dame, I give you good morning, and may God give you other good hours," he said politely.

"Why, who art thou and what dost thou wish?" said the old woman, pleased at the gallant manner of this handsome fellow. "I am an outlaw," he whispered. "Men call me Robin Hood." He purposely assumed a dramatic, thrilling note in his announcement. The old lady, who had had no excitement since her good husband died and left her penniless, felt sorry for this brave and lawless man.

"What is it I can do for thee?" she queried.

"The bishop and his company are seeking me. If thou wouldst give me thy mantle and shoes and hose and cap, I could meet the bishop as he passes and he would not know me. If thou refusest, I shall die. And it is Christmas day."

"I shall do as thou wishest, for once a long time ago thou didst bring gold shillings on thy way home from a Nottingham fair, saying they belonged not to thee, so they might as well be mine."

Robin Hood got into the widow's garments with her help and hid his hair beneath her cap. He groaned as he put on her shoes. Taking her spindle and flax, he set forth slowly on the highway. Soon he heard gay voices and saw that the people of Nottingham were pouring from the chapel. Merry were the greetings they caroled back and forth this Christmas day. At last the bishop came forth, accompanied by his men. He mounted a dapper white horse and rode off slowly, his thin cruel mouth smiling mechanically. As he drew near the old woman's house she came to the door, screaming as Robin Hood had bidden her do.

"What is it, good woman?" asked the bishop.

"Robin Hood, the outlaw, hath just come upon me and stolen all I have. He is ranging within the castle grounds."

The Bishop of Hereford turned pale and bobbed his little head, birdlike, at his men ordering them in whining fury to ride ahead and capture the rascal.

When the bishop's men had ridden on, Robin Hood slipped from behind the widow's house and planted him-

self squarely in front of the little man.

"And who art thou?" said the bishop irritably.

"A nice old woman," said Robin Hood in a deep bass voice.

"Woe is me," the bishop cried, "that I ever saw this day!" He turned to flee but Robin Hood was upon him, pulling him from his horse and blowing his horn loudly. If any of the villagers heard the musical blast, they thought it only some one of their people making merry at Yuletide. The yeomen who had hidden in the caves of Castle Rock came to their master's rescue, and soon they had carried the bishop off, though he kicked his long robes most disgracefully and cried like a baby.

Away from the town, they mounted their horses that other outlaws had brought to meet them, and at dinner time reached the sandstone castle at Popish Hills. Blindfolding the bishop, they led him through the secret passages to the high and lofty rooms near the sky where they had found such comfort and warmth throughout the long winter.

"We shall have mass after our dinner," said Friar Tuck. "Brothers, bring the bishop some black coarse bread, for that is monastic fare, and 'tis wicked for him to indulge in anything better."

"I am very sorry," said Robin Hood solemnly, "that thou art not allowed by thy high calling to join with us in our simple meal of roasted roe and pheasant and boar, venison in paste, pure pottage, peacock flourished, roasted rabbit and plover, fine custards, and a few choice wines, old gold and purple and scarlet liquids."

"Nay, but it is wrong for us even to speak of it to him," replied Friar Tuck, rubbing his hands together and licking his lips. "Coarse black bread is all a bishop ever eats. Or perhaps he eats nothing at Yuletide. Why, I do believe it is nothing!"

The bishop, white with fury and fear, did not answer. He shivered and flashed looks of hatred at this fat, merry little friar.

After the outlaws had eaten their fill and had watched the hungry bishop grow paler and paler, they rose from the long stone table, and Robin Hood said, "We shall say thee a mass, first, dear bishop, to show thee how good we are, and then after, thou shalt say us one."

So Friar Tuck rose solemnly. He broke into a fit of coughing and choking and sputtered forth: "Quick, I die unless I pour some good ale down the right way. All that I have drunk so far hath gone down the wrong way."

After they had comforted him, he began in a high chanting voice a mass all his own. There was in England at that time a certain custom that allowed a play upon the Gospels without the sin of sacrilege, and this was the saying of a mock mass which read, instead of "The Gospel of St. Mark," the "Gospel of Silver Marks," and the words of the mass pretended to bless those who had money, who kept money, who stole it; instead of those who gave money and believed, as the Bible said, in humility and simplicity. All this was a gentle satire upon the clergy of the time, for many of them were known for their greed and, like the Bishop of Hereford, would

marry a usurer in the church even though it was forbidden, in order to collect a round fat fee to be spent on rich food and sparkling liquors. To read this mass to a member of the clergy was to tell him that he was suspected of following the "Gospel of Silver Marks" in his way of living, so that is why Midge clapped his hands in glee when Friar Tuck said:

"I shall read thee the beginning of the Gospel according to Silver Marks. Now it came to pass that a certain poor clerk came to the court of the lord pope saying, 'Have pity on me because the hand of poverty hath touched me.' But the pope said on hearing this, 'Friend, thy poverty perish with thee. Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savorest not of the things that be of money."

An angry flush stained the bishop's cheek, not because he was horrified at their play upon the Gospel, but because he knew the tale would get abroad as tales of Robin Hood always did, and he would be the laughingstock of all England.

"The Bishop of Hereford was present at the reading of the Gospel of Silver Marks," the people would say, and then laugh merrily at such a picture.

"Let me go now, rogues," the Bishop cried. "Ye have had your play, and well shall ye regret it."

"Yea, thou shalt go, but not until thou hast sung us a real mass," soothed Little John. "Stand here on the table by Friar Tuck and sing it like a good boy."

The poor bishop sang in a weak, quavering voice, but the outlaws pitied him not, for he suffered only discomfort, and all of them knew he had made others suffer far worse than that. "Goodby, goodby," they cried, as if he had been a favored guest. They blindfolded him and led him to the entrance of the cave. Here Little John placed him upon his white horse, put the animal's tail in his hands, and told him to pray for Robin Hood. The fat palfrey turned homeward, the bishop sitting backward upon it, too frightened to remove the bandage from his eyes until he had gone from the sight of the mischievous Robin Hood.

* * *

Night came, with stars like brilliant tapers. Christmas night in the black caves with star-like candles. Yuletide was over, and the laughter and song and gleeful trickery of the band was done. Peace and beauty lay over the dark countryside and crept into the outlaw camp.

"Tonight we shall fill the little chapel with the gifts we have made for it," said Robin Hood. "At midnight we shall sing a song of praise ending our Yuletide for another year."

They scampered to their hiding places and brought forth the most marvelous assortment of stone images. Friar Tuck had made a four-footed beast with a serpent's tail that could wind all over the whole sandstone rock if they wanted it to, he said. Little John had beaten a candelabra out of bronze that stood like a massive tree with seven branches to hold snowy tapers. They worked quietly in the little chapel, and no one saw Robin Hood steal away from them. He returned as unobtrusively as he had gone, and on the altar he placed his image of the Virgin. He put rich jewels near her and lit tall candles at her feet. So wrapped up was he in his work, he noticed not that one by one the outlaws had dropped what they

were doing and had gathered near him. They stared silently at the beautiful face of their Lady. No one asked who had made the image. None wondered at her presence there. She had come to them, smiling a little secretly, gazing at them with wide compassionate eyes. They bowed before her, and together they sang in sweet and murmurous chanting a carol made for Christmas day.

Nature's eternal Bonds fall asunder! A maiden beareth The Son of God! O the supernal Rapture and wonder! A virgin beareth! O pear-tree laden! O dark earth's jewel! O Son of God! The Father, seeing Our ruin cruel. Brought into being Out of the thorn-tree, Out of the rose-tree. A Rose Eternal! For our salvation And mediation The Queen of Heaven hath borne a rose! Godhead descending To our fragility Now hath exalted, Greatly exalted Mortal humility! O skyward wending! O equal blending Of earth and heaven. Of man and God!

The chanting ended. The outlaws left the little chapel quietly and gathered about the great roaring fire

in the refectory. Here the solemn beauty of the scene in the little chapel was pushed into the far corners of their mind. Again they were merry. Again they laughed and ate and drank brown October ale. Friar Tuck lifted his skirts above his bare fat knees and did for them his favorite dance, that in which he ran three steps and leaped into the air clapping his feet together. Robin Hood told them stories of brave Hereward, the first outlaw, and Little John sang the praises of Richard, their king who fought the cruel Saracens in far-away Jerusalem.

Yawning, they went to their warm beds, and sleeping dreamlessly they built up strength for the next day of strenuous work and still more strenuous play. Only Robin Hood lay with wide eyes. Now he chuckled at the plight of the Bishop of Hereford, now his thoughts were stern as he meditated on the plots of Sir Guy of Gisborne to put Earl John into King Richard's place forever, a tool in the wicked Norman's hands. How could he, an outlawed Saxon, keep the throne for Richard? How could he keep Lady Marian in safety if her father did not return? And in his heart he seemed to know the good Lord Hugh would never come back.

He left the little cave and walked through the dark corridors, feeling his way along with outstretched hands. The walls were rough and cold to his touch, the ground rocky and uncertain in the long passages. He reached the little chapel. Someone had left a single taper burning at the Virgin's feet. The thin bright flame lit up her face. All about her was darkness. No great windows like those of her cathedral at Chartres let in the blue light of night. No open doorways let in the song of birds, weirdly beautiful from the abyss of blackness. Only a

man stood near her, utterly alone as she was, as if he were imprisoned from the magic world of forest and village and sky. Perhaps she saw his prisoned heart, captive as long as his Saxon people were captive. He knelt before her in his world of shadows, murmuring passionately, "O dark earth's jewel!"

GOODBY TO THE CAVES

The days lengthened, and a time came when the outlaws dreaded spending the long hours of sunlight in the dark caves.

"We shall be hermits if we stay here longer," said Midge.

"'Tis labor enough to move, though," groaned the

plump Will Stutely.

"Lazy fellow, thou canst not stay here always just because of the trouble it is to pack up our belongings! I'faith, already thine eyes are beginning to look sleepy. Soon they will be blind like the mole's from living always in darkness."

Will Stutely ran anxiously to Little John to see if it were so.

"Tell me, Little John, is there a blind look about me? Look at mine eyes." He opened them until they were round like saucers. Astonished and surprised he looked as he strained them until even his eyebrows rose into half moons.

"No blinder than usual, Will," laughed Little John. And that was indeed a joke, for poor Will never could find anything his master sent him for, though it lay right before his very nose.

"Thou art right," said Robin Hood. "I have just been planning our departure. In a fortnight we must again be in Sherwood Forest. In the meantime we shall go to the Vale of Peace and Cathedral Lane and see what harm the winter snows have done to our groves. Soon the leaves will be on the trees and we can hide again in thickets the color of our Lincoln green; and soon the deer will serve as targets, instead of the circles we have had to draw on the rock walls, an uninteresting bull's eye indeed at which to aim."

So the fortnight flew by. There were windows and doorways to be walled up so that villagers who might climb the sandstone hills in the summer would not learn the secret passages that led into Robin Hood's winter camp. At night they made countless trips to Sherwood Forest, carrying with them the costumes they used for disguises, their armor, spoils of their playful wars upon the nobility, their barnyard fowl and cattle. And with each new visit to Sherwood they saw the trees heavier with foliage, arching more nearly over the roads, roofing the glades, and growing a deeper and richer green under the warming sun.

"'Tis long since I have lain on a mossy couch," cried Will Stutely, flinging himself upon a spongy green turf. But loud laughed the outlaws when, covered with moisture, he leaped up as suddenly as he had fallen.

"This is springtime, young fellow," laughed Little John. "The mosses are filled with melted snows and April showers."

It was the last day in the caves. All the packing and moving had been completed, and the outlaws perched high on the ledges of rock, perilously overhanging the river. Here they kicked their heels impatiently against the sides of the precipices and wished they could start, but Robin Hood ordered them to wait until nightfall so that dusk would cover their movements. Will Stutely

was the most impatient of all. He darted from room to room. Now his round, fat face appeared at a window to call loudly to the outlaws outside, now peered impishly around some impossibly dangerous crest frightening to death those who saw him.

"Here, Will," called Robin Hood.

The youth, bubbling over with impatience and energy, came slowly down to where his chief stood.

"Boy, thou hast been lost before—in fact, it is a habit of thine. Dost thou remember the Nottingham fair?"

Will hung his head and flushed, but he pouted a little to be so reproved on his last day at the caves.

"Soon it will be sunset and we start for Sherwood. There must be no delay when it is time for us to go, for we wish to reach the forest before dawn. If thou continuest to run wild about the caves, thou wilt either fall from a crest and we shall have to bear a corpse back to the Vale of Peace, or thou wilt get lost and keep us waiting all the night through for thee. So stay thou here in this great room where there is a target to shoot at, chess to play, good ale to drink, and a ledge above the river that Midge would call a balcony. Like the mother of the roe-deer fawn when she goeth forth to seek food and smiteth the young fawn with her foot and maketh a sign that he wander not from a certain spot. so I charge thee. And even as the fawn is so obedient that if men come upon him in that spot he stirreth not, but suffereth himself to be taken to death, so Will, take that as a lesson in obedience."

In reply to this reproof Will grunted a surly answer which Robin Hood took for a promise, and soon the young boy was left alone with Midge in the big cave to which Robin Hood had assigned him.

"The Master did not say that I should not wander away," said Midge mischievously.

"He did," argued Will Stutely.

"Nay, but he didn't," replied Midge.

"I say thee, 'twill be disobedience if thou goest

away," stormed Will.

"Then I shall go away," cried Midge, "for 'twould not be disobedience, since Robin Hood told me naught to obey."

Midge, half frightened at the quarrel he had brought about and a little uneasy lest he really be disobeying after all, though Robin Hood had not told him to stay

in the cave, ran forth to join the other outlaws.

Will Stutely stood in the middle of the silent cavern, shaking with anger. Tears came to his eyes. He stamped his foot, but as there was no one near to remark at this childish display of temper, he became a little calmer. He grew frightened at the silence. Why should he be the one to be punished and made to wait in one place until it was time to leave? The grievance in his heart grew and grew. It formed a lump in his throat. It settled in the pit of his stomach. It pulled at the corners of his mouth until his lips quivered in angry weeping. He shut his eyes and the grievance became red and green dots dancing in front of him. No one cared about him. They put him in a cave and made him stay there while all the others could wander about as they pleased. He would steal away through the secret passages to the doorway at the foot of the hill and find his way to Sherwood Forest alone.

He stole softly from the cave of the great room into the first passage that led away from the sounds of the outlaws. He stopped for a moment and listened intently to the low murmur of voices—talking about him probably, laughing at him because he was imprisoned like a naughty child. They would be sorry when they found him gone. He ran swiftly down the dark passages. stopping at the refectory to snatch a candle, which he lit with some difficulty. From this point he proceeded more slowly, lest the tiny flame that lit his way go out and leave him in a vast chasm of darkness. Why wasn't he nearly there? It seemed as if he had gone quite far enough. Down, and down, and to the right. Or was it to the left? Suddenly, to his horror, he found he was going up hill instead of down. Something was terribly wrong. The way to the door that led away from their camp had been a slow descent and a sudden opening in the rock. There was no up-hill pathway in the passage at all. He turned around and started back again. Here were two openings. Had he come from this one? Yes he recognized the rocky step where he had nearly fallen. But wait, the other opening had the same rocky step. He tore up its dark tunnel so swiftly that the force of the air killed the flame from the tiny taper. He fought back the panic that turned his knees to water, that made his heart pound and something in his throat flutter. It must be life that fluttered there in him. When he was dead, lying alone here between these mammoth walls, no life would flutter there. Beating his hands against the sides of the cavern, he followed the winding passages, screaming with terror. Once broken, the will that had kept him from panic fell away, and he cried hopelessly

for life and safety. But out of the void of blackness no sound came back to him, only a muffled echo more hopeless than his own voice.

* * *

It was Midge who first felt that something was wrong. Ever since he had left Will a vague stirring of unrest had bothered him. Well, why should he have stayed caged up in the dark with Will just because he was always getting lost? Robin Hood, making the last rounds before their departure, came upon Midge looking pensively down at the winding river.

"Oh, here thou art! I thought I left thee with Will," said the Master in a puzzled voice.

"Thou didst not tell me to stay with him," retorted Midge angrily.

"Hush, boy, there is no need to snap thy words forth. Thou hast done no wrong. I simply thought that thou wouldst stay with Will this last hour before we left, as I wanted someone to keep track of him, since he is forever getting lost."

"But thou didst not tell me to," persisted Midge sulkily.

"Nay, it matters not. Thou knowest that Will would like it not if I had appointed him a guardian. Come, let us go to him and tell him we shall leave at once since it is rapidly nearing evening."

Midge felt sulky and fearful in turn as they neared the cave where he had quarreled with Will. Will probably would not speak to him, and of course then he would not speak either. His proud heart beat angrily, but always the undercurrent of dread was there. Supposing something happened to Will—dear, good-natured careless playmate. Supposing he died and the last thing that had passed between them was an angry word.

"Halloo Will," Robin Hood's voice broke the silent emptiness of the cave in startled surprise. "Will, come out of thy hiding, it is time to be off. Will, I say! Will! Will!"

Midge stood rooted to the doorway. There was no sign of any human being in the cave. There was the chess board at which he and Will had played. There were his bow and arrows just where he had flung them down when he had stalked off in a fit of stubbornness on being ordered to stay.

Robin Hood passed the boy with a quick movement. Looking at him, Midge saw that his face was white and set.

"Master, Master!" Midge cried. "It is all my fault." Robin Hood stopped in amazement.

"What meanest thou?" he asked gently, putting his hand on the boy's shaking body.

When Midge had poured out his story, Robin Hood stopped only a moment to comfort him, and then, lifting his horn to his lips, summoned all the outlaws.

"Will has gone wandering again," he said lightly, but they saw that he was only veiling a terrible anxiety. "We must form search parties at once in the caves. Go yonder for candles, Midge, to the refectory. In groups of ten we will spread out in all directions, upward and downward, and always the last of the ten and the first shall mark the cave walls with chalk, or better still, leave a candle burning in the cave thou hast left before turning into the next. As soon as we have found him,

send word back to this central room where Midge will be waiting. Then he can run to the other groups and tell them the search is over."

Methodically they set about following their master's directions. No one smiled or joked, for well they knew how serious a thing confronted them. Lost in the caves! Had they not listened to Robin Hood's warnings about that very thing all through the winter? And once had not Little John led them down a passage he had found where a heap of white bones lay?

"Some poor body went too far in his explorings," was all that Little John had said. But it was enough to bring

home his meanings.

"That is the danger which often brings about death," Robin Hood had added gravely—"going too far—too great a distance out to sea, too reckless a battle against more than thou canst handle. Learn ye, brothers, to be moderate in all that ye do."

But Will Stutely was one of those lovable, helpless people who have no fear, who have no sense of moderation, and who, worst of all, are luckless.

Friar Tuck wept frankly, for he loved careless Will like a son. He quoted snatches of prayers and paternosters to God, Lady Mary, St. Michael, and All Saints. He repeated so quickly that none could tell what he was saying the famous prayer taught him once by a holy hermit, which names all the seventy-two names of God, even as men say them in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, beginning: "Here are the names of Jesus Christ, whosoever carries them upon him on a journey, whether by land or sea, shall be preserved from all kinds of dangers and perils, if he say them with faith and devotion."

Robin Hood did not pray. He was one of those courageous spirits who rise above everything in times of trouble. He prayed to his Lady only when danger was over. He had faith in her, feeling that she watched over him, and he exerted all his powers in helping to bring about miracles himself. His face grew paler as the night wore on and no sign of the hapless Will came to them. At last, when a sob had risen to the chief's lips and tears of weariness welled in his eyes, they came upon an unlit candle lying across their path. New life stirred in them. They hurried on, always taking the precaution of leaving a lighted taper or mark of some kind in the caves they left behind them.

They came upon him lying upon his face, a stream of blood staining the pallor of his cheek from the wound a sharp rock had made when he had fallen. His golden hair was tangled, and with his rosy cheeks faded he looked like a small child sleeping the death-like sleep of sickness. Robin Hood lifted him in his strong arms without a word, and while some one ran on ahead to tell poor frightened Midge that the wanderer was found, the little procession made its way back to the light.

The trip to Sherwood was left for another night, and all the next day was spent in bringing Will Stutely back to life again. They bathed his poor swollen head, fed him delicacies, and with cool and magic wines soothed his throat, which ached from his screams. Midge tiptoed about, a ghost-like figure, penitent, suffering as much as Will from regret and a reproachful conscience.

At last when late afternoon sent rays of golden sun across the boy's pale cheeks, he opened his eyes wide, and a gentle smile flashed across his lips.

"Forgive me," were the words that Robin Hood heard him say.

"Forgive, of course," shouted Friar Tuck nervously, "but if thou hadst only been like the fawn in the sermon Robin Hood read thee, and stayed where he told thee!"

Again the gentle smile flashed across the mouth of Will Stutely, and he said with all the impudence allowed to one who has been at death's door, "But remember, good friar, Robin Hood said in his little sermon to me that very often the fawn in his obedience met his death by not stirring from the spot where his mother had bidden him stay."

And then they knew that their Will Stutely was indeed back with them, clever and happy-go-lucky, and able to wriggle out of the bad graces of their master by just such a remark as his awakening words.

Night fell, and the outlaws left the caves silently as velvet-pawed animals in the forest. Looking back, they saw the Popish Hills sharply silhouetted against the deep blue sky, the river at their foot made golden by the moon. They looked at the heavens, and the great openness was new to them after the many months they had spent under a roof. They forgot the caves as quickly as they reached their forest home. Only Robin Hood remembered a tiny cloistered chapel in the hills, a Virgin hidden from the light, a jewel of the dark earth.

* * *

"We have not had a new member in our band for a long time," said Will Scarlet.

"Nay, wintering in the hills kept us from meeting men," answered Robin Hood. "By St. Michael, I have

the blood of battle coursing in my veins, too. I have not fought a bout with stranger or friend for many a long day."

"As soon as thou speakest of something, it looms upon the horizon," smiled Little John. "I see in the distance a rough-looking fellow approaching. He hath a long pikestaff upon his shoulder."

"I have never trusted a fellow with a pikestaff," said Friar Tuck.

"Hide ye," said Robin Hood, squaring his shoulders and going forth to make inquiry of the stranger. "I shall call you if I need you."

The two men drew near, each eyeing the other openly, and each seeing a broad-chested, robust man of muscle and brawn. Robin Hood was just about to ask the stranger sternly why he was in that part of Sherwood, when the impudent fellow drawled at him:

"Stand! Who art thou? Thou lookest like a bold and naughty fellow. And bold and naughty fellows who range in this part of the woods are not the best of men. In sooth, to be brief and to the point, thou lookest like a thief that comes here to steal our king's deer."

"But it is thou who comest here. I am already here," retorted Robin Hood. "And that is just what I was about to say to thee."

"Think of something better," the stranger said carelessly.

"Very well. I am the keeper of this forest. The king put me in trust of his deer, and I shall stay thee."

"If thou wert really a keeper thou wouldst have other keepers with thee, and it takes more than one man to make me stand."

"There are no other men, nor do I have any need of them, for I have a staff as good as thine, a bow and arrows, and sword as well," said Robin Hood boastfully.

"I care not for any of them. If I get a knock upon thy scalp, thou canst boast about as well as thou canst shoot."

"But how canst thou get a knock upon my scalp?" inquired Robin Hood gayly. "I really must teach thee to be more mannerly."

"Thinkest thou because thou art big and strong thou canst frighten me?" the stranger said impatiently.

Robin Hood flushed and put down his bow and his sword, taking only the great oaken staff he carried.

"I shall yield to thy weapon, since thou wilt not yield to any of mine. And to be quite fair in this fray, let us measure our staves lest mine be longer than thine."

"I care not how long thy staff is," the stranger said ungraciously. "My staff is eight foot and a half. It will knock down a cow, and I hope it will knock down thee."

Robin Hood, hearing this insult, lost his control and gave the man such a knock that the blood poured down his cheek. The stranger recovered himself at once and gave three knocks from three different sides, swinging the staff so deftly that had Robin Hood been watching him he could but have clapped with praise at the other's skill. But the outlaw chief was not watching. He could watch nothing for some time, for blood ran in his eyes, making him rage like a wild boar first seeing its own blood. The two chased each other about, hitting blindly, leg, or arm, or any place.

An hour went by, and Robin Hood, who was sorely out of practice, began to puff and gasp, and finally he

sputtered forth, "Hold! Hold thy hand and let the quarrel fall. We may thrash our bones to mash."

"Thy bones to mash," the stranger coolly corrected Robin Hood, for he was not nearly so out of breath as the outlaw.

Robin Hood could but laugh at the fellow's audacity, and say: "Indeed, thou art sure of thyself. However, thou hast surely won, and hereafter thou canst go free in Sherwood Forest."

"Thanks for that," said the stranger, "but I thank my staff for my freedom and not thee."

"As thou wilt," Robin Hood smiled. "What is thy name and thy trade and thy dwelling place?"

"Arthur-a-Bland is my name and I am a tanner of Nottingham. Long have I worked there, and I swear if thou ever come near me again, I will tan thy hide for naught."

Robin Hood persisted in overlooking each impudent sally that came his way, and said politely: "Gramercy, good fellow, since thou art so kind and generous and will tan my hide for naught, I will do that much for thee. Forsake thy tanner's trade and live in the greenwood with Robin Hood and his merry men."

"Robin Hood!" cried the tanner incredulously. "Why, if thou be Robin Hood I will join thy band. I would have joined it long ago. Tell me, where is Little John? He it is I came to seek. We are related on my mother's side, and as I have few brave kinsmen—they are all country parsons and men of law—I came to seek the only one in the family with any spirit."

Robin Hood blew his horn loudly. At once Little John and the others came from the grove.

"What is it, Master, pray tell?" cried Little John. "Thou art bleeding, thou hast a staff in thy hand, and so has the stranger in his!"

"This tanner that stands beside thee is a bonny fellow and, indeed, master of his trade, for he hath just

soundly tanned my hide."

"He is to be commended. If he hath hurt the Master, he shall have a bout with me and see, then, if he can tan mine also."

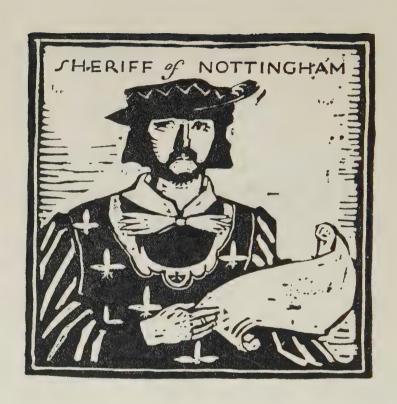
"Hold thy hand," said Robin Hood cheerfully. "He's a yeoman ready to join us and, strangely enough, of thine own blood. His name is Arthur-a-Bland. Little John, thy kinsman."

The two met each other with grace and kindliness, grasping each other's hands firmly and smiling with good will.

"But let me join thy hands, too," smiled Robin.

So they danced, all three in a ring, laughing and shouting, and one after another of the outlaws cried, "Let me in," and the circle was broken again and again until all the hundred men held hands. So it was that the outlaw band had grown, from friendly hands joining one another, and each year the circle grew larger within the Vale of Peace.

Bookthefifth



ROBIN HOOD MEETS WITH PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE

LITTLE JOHN CONCERNS HIMSELF WITH ENGLAND

"I would give much," said Robin, "to see the inner workings of political England. William de Longchamp, whom Richard wisely gave control of his kingdom in his absence, is losing some of that control through the continued opposition of Earl John. Thou knowest that Nottingham stronghold and Tickhil fly John's banner in open defiance of De Longchamp."

"But who is this man thou speakest of?" asked Midge in bewilderment. "Dost thou mean that Earl John hath not the power of ruling England in his brother's absence?"

"Yea, son. I thought that thou knewest. Richard, distrusting his brother, left his mother to be regent, but she being old and unfit to rule, he put a chancellor in charge, one William de Longchamp, who hath assumed the air of a sovereign and is putting his own Norman friends and relatives in all the posts of profit and honor."

"Then why is it not he that thou fearest instead of John? I have never heard thee speak of aught but the treachery of John and Sir Guy of Gisborne," protested Midge.

"William de Longchamp is a source of unpleasantness, but is no real danger, for even should Richard die, De Longchamp could hold no true claim to the kingship and would be forced at once to give up all that he has taken. His is a purely temporary power, and if anyone assaults the throne, he must uphold it in the name of Richard, and so is really on Richard's side. But Earl John has a claim to the throne, and if he manages to put William de Longchamp out of power and then kills his brother, nothing will stop him from ruling England."

"There is another heir ahead of him," put in Little

John quietly.

"Yea, Arthur, the son of Geoffrey, second son of King Henry, but Earl John feareth him not, and mark my words, Arthur will never be king of England."

"But even if John gets the throne, Richard will come back and kill him for his treachery," said Midge earnestly.

"But if Richard dies he cannot come back, and now that word cometh from the Holy Land that Philip of France and Richard the Lion Hearted are quarreling, perchance Earl John will enlist Philip's aid in keeping his brother away from England."

"Oh, it seemeth wicked indeed that when our brave King goeth on an errand of the Lord, his rights are stolen from him while his back is turned!" cried Midge sorrow-

fully.

"Perchance Richard will return safely after all," cheered Robin Hood, "and we who live near Nottingham, the enemy's camp, can keep our eyes open wide for any treachery."

This conversation lingered in more than one of the outlaws' hearts. As Robin Hood had told Will Scarlet long before, it was a waiting game that they must play. There was no great battle in which they could give their life blood for a noble cause. There were no secret mes-

sages to search for, no plans of the enemy. They must wait, helplessly holding their hands, until Richard returned and made war upon his brother, John.

It was Little John who felt the greatest anger. His hatred for Earl John smoldered in his heart and burned in his mind until the whole disposition of the outlaw was changed. He became morose and bitter. He cared not about using his marvelous skill with bow and arrow, and he felt a vague resentment even with his companion Robin Hood, that he did not do something to stop the chain of circumstances developing in England. Finally one day he donned the garments of a poor tradesman and, saying goodby to the outlaws, set out for Nottingham Castle. He knew not what he intended to do thereperhaps enter the service of the castle household or of the sheriff who lived in a manor just outside the castle wall. But he wished to be nearer than he had ever been to those nobles who knew what mischief was afoot in the court of England. He wished to see for himself what was happening to brave King Richard's throne.

* * *

In the ladies' quarters of Nottingham Castle a group of young damsels sat near the windows looking down into the courtyard. They were those daughters of the nobility of the neighborhood who were at liberty to come and go as they pleased in the great castle as long as the king, or the regent in the king's absence, was away from the castle. They sewed busily, scalloping with wool, putting on buttons of coral and amber, flouncing and tucking, and gilding soft white veils with golden threads woven into designs. And as fast as they plied their needles

and slender white fingers their tongues flew, and sometimes they discussed their sewing and often they talked of more entertaining things.

"Anne, what is't thou art trying to do now?" asked one merry damsel, affecting a pose of ignorance at the complicated work that her friend was attempting. "I know I couldn't do it, whatever 'tis."

"I am making over," said Anne. "See, if I cut off this lion's head and feet and tail, I can make a soaring eagle out of his body."

"Why, look, can it be true that she does it?" they all

cried, crowding around her.

"'Tis a great saving," said Anne primly, "when the heraldry must be changed for each different feast. 'Tis a wise plan. See, I can make a hare out of this swan very easily by turning it upside down and cutting so—and so—and so."

"'Tis wonderful!" cried Elizabeth.

"Whoever taught you to do it?" asked Louise.

"Oh, dear," lamented the woeful voice of Marian Fitzwalter, "look what I have done!"

"What is it?" they cried in quick sympathy, for well they knew her difficulties with the needle and often they whispered she should have been a man, though, indeed, she was the most beautiful and womanly among them.

"I thought I'd try a way of making over too," she said sadly. "I took these lovely purple beads to put in the center of the spangle flowers, but when I went to rip out the center spangles to make room for the purple beads—look what happened!" She held aloft a piece of blue velvet that had nothing on it at all, and pointed with tragic gesture at a heap of spangles at her feet.

"Of course, child," said Anne in the manner of one who on all occasions knows exactly what is wrong. "The spangles were all on one thread, and you could not rip out just the center ones without having them all come off."

"Well, anyhow, now I can have a new gown," said Maid Marian with a triumphant smile.

The young damsels looked at one another a little consciously at her remark. Finally Anne, who feared nothing, spoke to the extravagant maiden reproachfully.

"Marian, thou should'st be more serious. Supposing that the regent John needs our money in his war against William de Longchamp. We should save it to help him our fathers say."

"And why, just why, should John fight William?" said Marian impetuously.

"Hush," giggled Elizabeth. "Calling the king by his first name! Oh, thou art dreadful!"

"He isn't the king, and thou art the dreadful one to look upon him so. Richard is our king, and we should never forget it," Marian stormed.

"Hush, King Richard hath gone and perhaps never will return," Anne said. "My father sayeth that it is no one's fault but Lion Heart's himself if Earl John taketh the throne. A king should not leave his people."

"Anyhow, thou shouldst not spend money on gowns, Marian," said Eleanor with gentle candor, "because thy father is away, and should he die thou wouldst have no money."

"No money, what meanest thou?" said Marian, turning a little pale. "Why, I have a great fortune that Sir Guy of Gisborne is guarding for me. That is why I have

to live at his manor and be so pestered by that stupid little Geoffrey, his son. I am in his keeping until my father's return. And speak not of such a thing! My father will return. The Virgin will watch over him—he is so good."

"Well, I suppose that thou knowest, but I have heard," continued Eleanor with an excited little tremor

in her voice, "that—"

"Look what I have done," shouted Anne, trying to interrupt.

"What hast thou heard?" Marian dropped her sew-

ing and stood before Eleanor with flaming eyes.

"N-nothing," stammered the damsel.

"Tell me all of it, and by All Saints, speak truthfully," ordered Marian.

"Well—that thy father owed Sir Guy every farthing that he had. That thou art living on charity with Sir Guy, due to his goodness, and that unless thou obey him and marry his son Geoffrey he will charge thee with thy father's debt and on Lord Fitzwalter's return throw him into prison."

Marian turned very pale as she heard these cruel words. But forcing her lips into a smile, she picked up her sewing again and began singing in a low sweet voice:

To our field-meeting
Stole I at even,
There was my true love come before!
So sweet was his greeting
(Lady of Heaven)
That I am blessed forevermore.
Kissed he me? Yea, thousandfold!
Tandaradei,
See, my red lips are not yet cold.

The other maidens stirred a little restlessly and cast their eyes down with embarrassment. Strangely enough, they felt an intense dislike for silly little Eleanor who had told all she knew. But Marian—had she no feelings? Or did the song she sang cover them?

"Thou singest love songs," said Anne disapprovingly.

"The tune is nicer than hymns," answered Marian airily and began it again.

"Oh, look," cried Louise, breaking into loud giggles which she tried to suppress with her tiny white hands. "Isn't he f-funny?"

They peered over the window casement, eight of them, their eyes bright with curiosity and their red lips parted in mirth. For standing in the castle yard, his feet apart, an expression of extreme stupidity upon his open countenance, was a perfect giant of a man. He carefully put down a peddler's bag that he carried and sat down upon it with a sad, discouraged air. Immediately men of the king's guard surrounded him and poked fun and questions at him.

"Well, beanstalk, didst thou come to grow up the sides of Nottingham Castle?"

"Didst thou think to hide thy great self by getting inside the wall?"

"What art thou selling, herbs to make a man grow? They say, indeed, that there are such grasses that when taken make a man swell and change his whole form."

"I'faith, tease me not," said the tall stranger sadly. "I have traveled from far away and there is naught left in my sack to sell. I have crawled in here to die."

"Thou canst not die here. It is the castle of Earl John, and if he becomes king of England, as we expect

him to, this will be the court of the land instead of London, we wager."

"I may as well die in a king's court. 'Tis as good

a place as any," said the young giant sadly.

"Why dost thou not join the sheriff's guard? He is a dreadful coward and will take none but tall, strong fellows like thee in his service. Perchance he hath room for another."

"I do not like fighting," said the stranger.

"But come thou to the sheriff's manor, anyway. If thou dost not like fighting, he may put thee to cleaning silver."

A gay sound of laughter came from the windows of the castle, and looking upward the men saw the eight lovely ladies of Nottingham eyeing the stranger with amused expressions, but as soon as they saw that they were caught they disappeared like so many puppets pulled back by an invisible string.

"Perchance I will stay," said the tall young man more cheerfully, which sent the guards into gales of laughter.

"He liketh the ladies, fancy, now! Canst thou see

far enough down to tell what they look like?"

"I will show ye what the world looks like from my height," the stranger answered good-humoredly, and before any of the guard could protest, he had lifted two of them, one in each hand, to the top of the wall.

They looked at him angrily and a little frightened at

his display of strength.

"Now that ye have seen it from up high, would you like to see it from down low again?" he asked.

And thinking he meant to return them to earth, they said "Yea."

As quickly as one takes china cups from a shelf and puts them on the table, the young giant placed each guard on his head. They rolled over and jumped up ready to give him a good beating.

"What is the matter?" said the stranger.

"Matter enough," cried the guards. "Thou stoodest us on our heads as if we were ninepins."

"I am very sorry, indeed," quoth the big man politely, "I thought that ye knew what I meant when I asked ye if ye wished to see the earth from down low. I tried only to put your eyes at the lowest point possible, to be entirely accurate in my statement."

Then they laughed, for the fellow looked more stupid than warlike, and they thought that perchance after all he had acted with good intentions.

Taking him to the sheriff's house, they made him show his skill at other things—carrying dishes in both hands, dusting the ceilings that none of the other servants could reach, and finally the sheriff said that he would take him into his service if he could use arms in a manner that would be helpful in case attack were made upon the manor.

"But I have never killed anything in my life," said the big man meekly, "not even a rabbit. I know not how to hold a sword."

"Give him a bow and arrow and see if he can hit a target," said the sheriff.

"Holdest it thou with the string away from thee?" asked the stranger helplessly. "I swear thee, I have always been afraid of touching these evil things."

They showed him how to hold the bow and arrow and where to aim.

"Hide all of ve behind him," laughed one of the guards. "He will perchance shoot to the tower of the castle, and then again he may only send his arrow an inch." No one stirred as the giant of a fellow pulled the string clumsily, let it slip, and pulled it again. Every mouth was ready to smile and jeer, for they thought that he had not even aimed at the target, so intent was he upon the inserting of his arrow. A momentary gleam in the giant's round and guileless eyes, a whizzing of the arrow, a startled gasp from the onlookers. In the brown knot of the tree that they had given him as a target, a slender arrow had pinned itself. Each of the guards looked at the other, thinking that someone had played a joke and shot at the same time as did the stranger for the same target, and that it was another arrow than the one the tall man had shot that quivered in the bull's eve. But no other bow was in sight.

"Did I hit it?" the great fellow said meekly. "I cannot see very well, you know. In fact, I think I shut mine eyes as I drew the string. It was my first attempt at

such a shooting and I was a little frightened."

They laughed and clapped him on his back. The round little gnome of a sheriff rubbed his hands together gleefully, and said, "Now I have an archer that can equal Robin Hood or Little John or any of the others of that outlaw band. What now is thy name and in what country wert thou born?"

"In Holderness I was born, and men call me Reynold Grenelefe when I am at home," said the tall stranger, and he thought it a good joke that he had given his name as Grenelefe, for that savored a little of the greenwood. And he hid his smiles at the thought that he equaled Robin Hood or Little John, for was he not one of them himself? And wouldn't Robin Hood pretend to be angry to hear his shooting classed with that of his henchman?

"Wilt thou dwell with me, Reynold Grenelefe? I will give thee twenty marks' fee each year to serve me."

And as this was just what Little John wished, he said that he would, though he did not add that it might be for only a day or two.

The first night passed, and Little John heard naught but the sheriff's snores. No visitors came to the manor gates, and Little John knew no more about affairs at Nottingham than when he had lived in Sherwood Forest.

But when the day came, people that Little John had not seen before began to stir in the household. There was the sheriff's steward, a tall man with sallow yellow cheeks and a manner of slipping from room to room silently and slyly. There was the cook, round and red as a cook should be, with a quick temper but a good heart. The butler held his head high and thought that he was much better than the others because he it was who put out the silver and fine china.

"There is to be a banquet here tonight," said the cook to Little John. "Thou hast come at an unlucky moment. We must work harder today than most of the year except the festival occasions."

"Why, who cometh to the banquet that thou must work so hard?" asked Little John.

"Sir Guy of Gisborne, the greatest man in Nottingham. He it is who looketh after Nottingham Castle when none of the royal family are here. They say he is as close to Earl John as his own brother, Richard."

"Closer, I would suppose," said Little John grimly.

"What didst thou say?" asked the cook suspiciously, as he looked up from the great haunch of venison cooking over the fire.

"Nothing," answered Little John, assuming the look of vacant stupidity that had been a more effective disguise than the ragged clothes he wore.

"Faith, wilt thou have wit enough to serve with the butler, dost thou think?" asked the steward.

"I can carry a dish at a time," said Little John meekly.

And the long afternoon wore its way through with Little John working harder than he liked to do with the sheriff of Nottingham as his master. And in the evening the candles were lit and the silver was brought forth from under lock and key and put on the long table, so that the small room looked as luxurious and opulent as the castle of Nottingham itself.

Little John waited with that marvelous patience and calmness that had served him well all his life through and had made him a man to be relied upon and confided in, as Robin Hood had discovered.

He went quietly about his tasks, and although he knew that the sheriff was pointing him out to Sir Guy as a new-found treasure, he gave no sign that he had even seen the newcomer.

"He looketh stupid," he heard Sir Guy murmur.

"Yea, that is his greatest virtue. He knoweth no one in Nottingham and hath not wits enough to put two and two together, but how he can shoot, and what strength he hath! He lifted a guard in each hand from the castle courtyard up to the wall and down again," proceeded the sheriff before launching off on a long and boastful account of his other servants and their virtues.

None of this interested Little John, but no word escaped him, for he knew that if two sly dogs like the sheriff of Nottingham and Sir Guy of Gisborne got together, he would surely hear something of the state of English affairs, since both were mightily concerned with conditions at the royal court. At last a name rang out. In a lower key it was spoken, but to Little John who had awaited it, it might have been accompanied with ringing bells: "—plans for William de Longchamp's removal."

"But how can it be done without open war?" queried the sheriff.

"I have spoken to Earl John of a plan that pleaseth him," said Sir Guy of Gisborne modestly.

"At once can it be done?" said the sheriff eagerly.

"Nay, but not far off. John, the Earl of Mortain, will gather together all the Anglo-Norman barons, like myself, who stand with him. We shall go to Saint Paul's church in London, sending word to all the Saxon inhabitants of London to come there also."

"What! Thou wouldst have Saxons in thy plans? Come, thou art mad, the Saxons love Richard and will oppose John."

"Nay, bide a little. The Saxons will not know what they are doing, and after it is done they cannot cause trouble because they will have had a part in the doing."

"William de Longchamp will not be deposed unless it be by war," said the sheriff gloomily.

"Yea, but he will. Listen. We shall bring all the Saxon traders and artisans to St. Paul's church and here greet them cordially. They are simple people and will be fooled by our good will. We shall read to them in French, which they cannot understand, a supposed

letter from Richard dated at Messina and setting forth that the chancellor shall be deposed if his conduct be not good. We shall read this and take a vote of the whole assembly. No matter what the outcome be, we shall of course make it be that John, Earl of Mortain, the King's brother, all the bishops, earls, and barons of the kingdom, and the citizens of London, agree to depose from his office the chancellor, William de Longchamp because of his overbearing deeds such as sealing public documents with his own seal instead of that of England. We shall then shut the chancellor up in the tower and the kingdom belongeth henceforth to John."

"Until Richard's return, when we shall all be killed,"

the sheriff said with a shiver of fear.

"Richard will not return. Even now we have traps laid for him all the way home, and Philip of France is in communication with John, agreeing to help him in all we do to take the kingdom out of Richard's hands. Aye, a great day is coming for you and me. John will be an easy king, and gold shall pour through our hands."

Little John absorbed all this without flickering an eyelash. He poured more wine into the cups of those he served, removed dishes quietly, and kept so much in the background that even the butler, who had eyed him with displeasure ever since his appearance, forgot that he was there.

The night wore on, and at last the sheriff rose, clapped Sir Guy on his shoulder, and said boisterously: "There has never been a greater man since Caesar than thou art. Marry thy pallid son to the fiery Lady Fitzwalter and perchance she will learn from thee some of thy wisdom and lead thy son as high as thou wilt go."

"That is just what I am going to do, and very soon, at that," answered Sir Guy with an oily smile. "Goodnight. Hunt with me at sunrise day after the morrow."

"Gladly," said the sheriff, though he detested hunting, for he liked not to exert himself. He dared not refuse, however, for it was a great honor to be sought out by Sir Guy.

Again Little John was forced to wait through another long day and night, until the morning after the morrow of Sir Guy's visit, the sunrise at which the sheriff arose to go hunting with the man who plotted against his king.

Little John lay in his bed, though his duties at the manor demanded that he arise when it was still dark.

"Bring me food and drink," he cried in a loud voice.

The steward came running to him, thinking it must be the sheriff ordering him. Great was his amazement to see the newcomer, Reynold Grenelefe, with his golden head pillowed on a downy couch.

"By the saints, bring thee a meal, indeed! Never shall I wait upon thee, and if the sheriff were home he would force thee to pack up thy belongings and leave straightway for thy impudence."

"Thou needest a whipping," said Little John, seizing the steward by his thin waist and putting him over his knee. Then he tied the fellow to the bedpost securely with knotted sheets.

Next he went to the butler and demanded service.

"I shall tell the master on thee, thou scurvy Saxon," the butler said haughtily.

Little John said not a word, but, yawning widely, lifted the fellow by the scruff of his neck and dropped him into the well. Here his loud yells were drowned by

the rushing sound of water, and he could do naught but stand there getting colder and colder.

"Now for the cook," said Little John, "for he is the

one who maketh the meal, after all."

But the cook, who had seen the strange happenings, had hurried into the cupboard and was holding the door shut with the pressure of his round, heavy little body. It took Little John but a moment to open the door, sending the cook head first into a flour barrel that stood behind him. But covered with flour though he was, the stanch little cook seized a knife from the shelf and, giving Little John one also, challenged him to sword play, though the swords were only half as long as they should be and nearly twice as sharp.

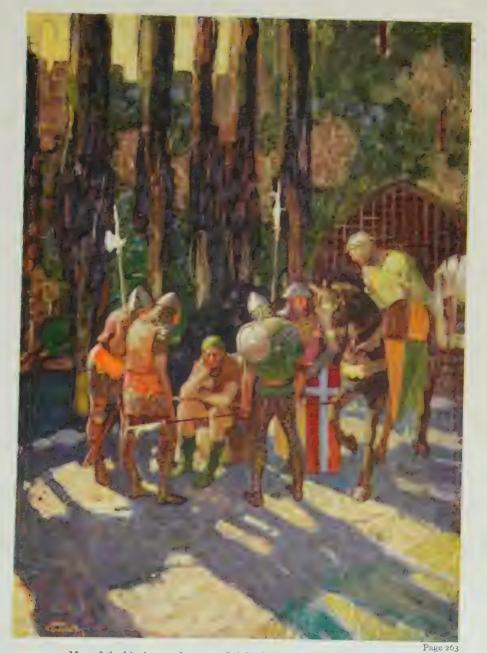
For two long hours they fought, and at last Little John cried, "I make my vow to God, thou art one of the best swordsmen I ever saw. Come with me to the greenwood, and two times in the year thou shalt have a new suit of Lincoln green, and twenty marks to thy fee Robin Hood will give thee also."

"Put up thy sword, and I shall be thy fellow and come with thee," said the cook.

Then they drank good wine and ate the best things that the pantry held.

"I never thought food tasted so good," said the cook in a puzzled voice. "I have never had a chance to do more than taste and try as I prepared the dinner."

They carried away silver vessels, spoons, and three hundred pounds and three good pence. And Little John knew that Robin Hood would say this was right, for had not the sheriff just collected an unlawful tax from all the poor peasants of the village?



Men of the king's guard surrounded Little John and poked fun at him



They hurried along the highway, dodging into thickets by the side of the road whenever they saw figures in the distance. The little cook did not talk, but trudged cheerfully along, carrying more than his share of the heavy silver. He looked with admiration upon the tall, straight figure of Little John and wondered why the other's eyes were serious and thoughtful.

At last they reached Sherwood Forest, and a laughing boy rushed to meet them.

"Little John! Master, Master, Little John hath returned," cried Midge.

The cook saw a man of some years come gracefully forth from the glade. He moved with the swift, lithe motions of a forest deer. His eyes shone with a manly emotion as he wrung the hand of Little John, and eagerly he questioned him, "Didst thou find what thou wished? And who is this merry stranger? I hope he is to be one of us."

"Yea, Master, that he is. His name is Nicholas de Hanred, and he is the best cook in England. Call the friar. They should be most excellent friends."

Robin Hood understood at once that Little John wished to speak with him alone, so he sent Midge off with Nicholas and then turned kindly to his good friend.

"Thanks be to heaven thou art returned. There is no one quite like thee, comrade." He spoke without the thrill of emotion that so often robs sweet words of their sincerity.

"Thank thee, Master," cried Little John, and said no more, for words did not come easily to him, and he knew that Robin Hood understood that his heart said many things that his lips could not frame. "Is England waiting for our aid?" said Robin Hood

teasingly.

"Thou wert right, Master. There is nothing we can do now. I overheard a wicked plot to remove William de Longchamp from his chancellor's office, and a still more terrible plan to waylay Richard on his return so that John may become monarch over us all. But what can we do? We cannot sail the seas to the Holy Land and bring Richard back with us. We should all be killed by Philip's men, who are watching to see that Richard does not return too soon. We cannot go to London and keep De Longchamp on the throne, for we are but a handful beside the factions that Sir Guy of Gisborne has organized for Earl John. Nothing to do but wait and pray that Richard reaches England."

"But if he does come, Little John—and by the sweet Virgin he will—then think how we can help him. We can join his army in the attack that he will have to make on Nottingham, for Sir Guy of Gisborne and the other nobles will always oppose him until they are captured. Who knows the secret passages of Castle Rock as well as Robin Hood's men? Those Saxons who have learned to love us we can arouse to stand by Richard the Lion Hearted, even though he be a Norman. We can punish such men as the sheriff and Sir Guy of Gisborne. We can become the King's men ourselves, Little John. In sooth, we can bear warrants for those who have long carried warrants for us."

"Thou wilt become the follower of a Norman king, then, Master?"

"Little John, a day must come when he who rules us is neither Norman nor Saxon, but an English king. It is not the Normans that I hate. It is their way of making slaves of those who are called Saxons. When Richard returns, may he be the king of England, not of Anglo-Normandy! Let not Normans or Saxons serve him, but both of them, and let them be called English."

The two men looked deep into each other's eyes, and each read in the other's glance a wish for future England. Suddenly a long call of a hunter winding his horn broke the stillness.

"Hark ye! I know whose hunting call it is, I'll wager," said Little John. And laughingly he told Robin Hood how he and the cook had dismantled the sheriff's house whilst he went to hunt with Sir Guy of Gisborne.

"We shall bring them here to dine, and thou and the cook shall wait upon them with their own silver," laughed Robin Hood, sending messengers to all the outlaws to follow the sound of the horns and bring the two hunters to Robin Hood's grove.

The first person that the sheriff laid eyes upon was his servant Reynold Grenelefe.

"Oh, oh," he moaned, "thou varlet! Thou hast betrayed me to my worst enemy."

"Nay, I was thy worst enemy," said Little John, "and thou didst betray thyself to me by thy wickedness long ago."

Sir Guy of Gisborne would not answer any questions they put to him, nor would he offer any words. He sat, a pale, gaunt figure, shivering with fright, staring at Robin Hood with crafty eyes. He knew that begging for mercy would not give it to him. He knew that he would be hanged, for did he not always hang his own enemies when they were once caught? But instead of hanging or imprisonment, Robin Hood cheerfully invited his unwilling guests to dine with him. They crouched upon the ground, stiffly, and quite unlike the graceful outlaws. The only sound from either one of them was a low groan from the sheriff when he saw his silver plate upon the table.

After the meal was over, Robin Hood stood before

the two men and said coldly:

"We do not like your company any better than ye like ours. Go ye from the forest. Only, before ye leave, swear that ye will bring no arrest against Robin Hood or any of his band the rest of the year."

Sulkily the two swore, and rising stiffly from the cold ground, they hurried as fast as their rheumatic limbs would let them from the presence of the famous outlaw.

"Their promises are worth naught, but it is good for their systems to swear for others as well as to bow before a higher authority once in awhile," laughed Robin Hood.

"I forgot to tell thee," said Little John thoughtfully, "that that scoundrel Sir Guy of Gisborne intends to marry his son to Lady Fitzwalter at once."

"Master," cried Will Scarlet with quivering lips, "we must save her. Thou sayest at once, Little John?"

"I think, Will," Robin Hood answered dryly, "that the Lady Fitzwalter will have a good deal to say about that marriage. In fact, I do not fear for that fiery young lady at all. But we shall keep our eye upon her."

"Both eyes," murmured Will softly.

OUR LADY DISCHARGES A KNIGHT'S DEBT

"Come and dine, Master," cried Will Stutely.

"I'faith, like the good King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, I have no inclination to dine unless I have some bold baron, squire, or jolly clergyman here with me, to pay for the best if he be an uninvited guest, to join in the best if he be someone we desire. There is a joy in giving, and if we can't have that joy, there is the fun of taking from those like the sheriff of Nottingham and the wily Sir Guy of Gisborne."

"But clouds are piled high in the heavens, Master. No one will ride this way tonight. Thou hadst better

come and dine," persisted Will.

"Nay," answered Robin Hood with some display of irritation, for he liked to carry out his plans the way he had always followed them, disliking changes as much as a settled housewife. "Before we dine we shall say three masses, one in the worship of the Father, the other of the Holy Ghost, and the third of our dear Lady, and then if none hath come to our grove by the time we have finished the masses, I will dine with thee."

Will Stutely went in search of Friar Tuck, who was always willing to say a mass on any occasion, for it gave him a chance to stand before the band as if he were the chief.

They had scarcely begun the prayers when a lone horseman galloped into the glade, seeking cover from the approaching storm. Looking up, Robin Hood saw that the rider was an old knight. He seemed to be in some distress. One foot hung out of his stirrup as if he cared not what kind of a figure he cut upon his handsome charger. A hood was pulled down over his eyes, that looked forth at the world with gentle and wistful candor. He slipped from his mount and stood looking at the curious circle of men in Lincoln green, all on their knees, praying, saying the chants like well-remembered ballads, in monotonous and tripping melody. In turn they looked at him and saw that his body was marked by a certain grace, rather spiritual than bodily, for his whole form was very emaciated and meager. His skin was delicate and very pale, and the white hair framing his face accentuated its thinness.

Little John went forward to greet him. "Welcome, gentle knight," he said, for instinctively the word gentle came to the outlaw's mind as he looked at the stranger. "Our master bids thee dine with us. Whatever thou mayst have to tell us of thyself must wait until the feast is over, for that is the only law of my master's household."

"Who is your master?" asked the knight.

"Robin Hood. Doth his name mean aught to thee?"

"Yea," said the knight, "all men have heard of Robin Hood. Perchance some have heard different things about him, but what I have heard is enough—that he is a noble yeoman who doeth much good. I shall dine with thee gratefully, for I thought that I could find nothing to eat until the storm was over and I could go on to Doncaster."

Then the outlaws led the knight to the lodge, a lovely embowered cottage within the Vale of Peace, built on a neck of land that jutted out into the little lake between two high cliffs. When the storm broke, the outlaws were safely inside and the sound of the rain on the roof made the warm little room seem more homelike than ever. The old knight seemed possessed of a marvelous sense of courtesy, for he blessed Robin Hood more than once and thanked them all again and again for their kindness to him.

"I think he is in trouble," whispered Midge, whose quick sympathy had been aroused when he glimpsed a tear in the stranger's eye.

"We shall see," Will Stutely answered. "The Master will find out what it is and help him out of his difficulties,

whatever they be."

But not a word was said during the feast to bring sadness or distress to anyone, for that was the order of Robin Hood. They drank the good ale and had their fill of roasted swan, pheasant, and fowl, and their talk was merry and often instructive, for Midge asked so many questions that particular knowledge often was needed to answer him.

"Friar Tuck," he said thoughtfully, "how doth a boy become a monk?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Will Stutely. "Art thou considering it, Midge? Thou art too fond of food and ale to live

long upon coarse black bread."

"Nay, our Midge would not make a good boy monk," agreed Friar Tuck. "He cannot keep a tune, and when the nocturnes are sung, should a novice make a single fault in the singing or psalmody he is whipped with pliant and smooth osier rods. To answer thy question, however, the boy, who is just a boy like thee and Will, is brought to the altar after the gospel is read at mass. He

putteth his right hand on the altar cloth and kisseth it. Then the priest maketh the sign of the cross and putteth holy water on his head, and cutteth off all his curls with the shears, saying, 'Let us pray, beloved brethren!' and then the boy sayeth the prayer thou surely knowest which says, 'Grant we beseech thee, Almighty Lord—'"

"Oh, stop thy words," cried Midge. "I shall be a boy monk before we know it if thou go through the whole

service here before me."

At this they all laughed, for the boy looked actually worried and felt his long curls to reassure himself that when Friar Tuck had touched him upon his head he had not cropped off all his hair.

"It must be right marvelous to be a knight," said Will Stutely, his round eyes wide with excitement. "Hast

thou lived in the court of the king?"

"Nay, boy, 'tis not half so marvelous as living in the court of one Robin Hood," answered the knight sadly. "The court of the king is a strange and motley gathering. Perchance thou thinkest of it as being composed of fair ladies and brave men. Instead there are play-actors. washerwomen, dicers, taverners, buffoons, barbers, tumblers, royal merchants, vintners, and all the men who flatter the king for money, who fawningly give His Majesty their services and then speak bitterly of him behind his royal back. There are courtiers paid by the king's enemies to know the palace secrets, and courtiers paid by the king to seek out those very enemies. And perchance thou thinkest we stay at the castle surrounded by purple cloths and precious jewels, and dine on apples and dates and tarts? Instead, we are ordered from town to town when the king travels, but it is only the king who is served royally. Often there is only half enough for us to eat, and we must sleep in the mangers behind the taverns, soiling our clothes on the old straw left there since many months before."

The outlaws listened in amazement to this long speech, for, like Will Stutely, most of them had thought that the king's court was the luckiest band of nobles in the land, wearing robes of brocade from Bagdad, and ermine collars about their necks, and golden coronets studded with chrysolites and jacinths upon their heads. They had visioned great chambers studded with topaz and emeralds, pearls and rubies, with roses and lilies and violets banked against the stone walls, and vases of balsam and rosewater perfuming the air.

Then the gentle knight flushed a little, as if he had said too much, and, rising hastily, he bowed before Robin Hood, saying, "Gramercy! I have not had such a dinner for many weeks. If e'er again I chance to pass through thy country, I shall give thee such a dinner in return, I pray."

"Thank thee, stranger," said Robin Hood. "But it is our custom to make those who belong to the service of the king or of the Church to pay our band of yeomanry for what we give them."

"I have naught in my coffers," said the knight. He opened up all his bags, and they saw that it was so.

"Well, then, by the good Saint Mary, thou shalt have some," smiled Robin Hood, and hastily he poured forth a stream of gold from a little leather pouch that he carried.

The knight bowed his head to hide the tears of gratitude that filled his eyes.

"Now, tell me thy troubles," smiled Robin Hood. "Thou hast no money, yet thou art a knight.

thou lose thy fortune through folly or misdeed?"

"Nay, Robin Hood, honestly can I answer thee that I lost all that I had through kindness to my only son. When he was but twenty winters old he slew a knight of Lancaster. To save him, I sold all my goods and gave my lands into the keeping of a rich abbot near Saint Mary's Abbey for the sum of four hundred pounds. days hence I must pay the abbot the sum of the mortgage or my lands become his. I have no more in my pockets than thou hast seen, and my wife and son have only enough to keep from starving until I return to them. or until my son taketh on the garb of a toiler."

"What art thou planning to do?" asked Robin Hood.

"Naught, friend. My lands become the property of the rich abbot two days from now. My son shall care for his dying mother. And I-I go to join a crusade, that I may cross the sea to the mount of Calvary and see where my Christ met his death. Even there shall I meet mine."

"Nay, thy spirit is broken too soon," said Robin Hood, for he believed not in giving up until the life blood was flown from the body. To meet one's death willingly was not to obey the laws of God that taught how precious human life should be. "Hast thou no friends from whom to borrow the money that would keep thy lands from falling into the rich abbot's hands?"

"Many a friend I had until this misery befell me," sighed the old knight, "but now they have all run away from me and pay no more heed to me than if they knew me not. And thou canst not blame them, for the rich abbot would make things difficult for any of them who aided me."

"O Master," sobbed tender-hearted Midge, "let us be his friends to take the place of those who have run away from him!"

"Midge is right," said Robin Hood. "Go thou, Little John, to the treasury and bring me four hundred pounds. Certainly no money could be better told than to aid a gentle and kindly knight who hath fallen into poverty."

"Master," whispered Little John, "his clothes are thin. Could we not give the old man a livery? We have so many scarlet and green doublets, Master, that no merchant in all merry England can match our stock."

"Take him three yards of every color, and see that thou measure it well." And Robin Hood winked at Little John with this last statement, so that when Little John measured the cloth he left over three full handfuls after he had measured each yard.

"What kind of a draper art thou?" said little Midge.

"By heaven, John giveth him good measure," smiled Will Scarlet.

"The Master told me to measure it well," said Little

John quietly.

"Master," whispered Little John again, "ye must give the knight a horse for his son and pile high on its saddle food and clothes for his sick wife."

"Take him a gray courser," said Robin Hood. "And Midge, go thou and prepare dainties for him to carry."

"And a pair of boots," said Will Stutely.

"And when is my day when I must pay thee what I have borrowed?" asked the gentle knight.

"Fear not. I believe that Our Lady will discharge this debt for thee, but come thou back to the greenwood in a month's time and I will tell thee what to do."

So the old knight said goodby to them all and set forth swiftly to St. Mary's Abbey that he might pay the rich abbot the four hundred pounds before the next nightfall, and so keep the land that belonged to him.

"Farewell," called Midge, for he liked especially anyone in the world who had had his life tempered with

sadness.

"Luck be with thee!" called Little John.

"Farewell!" they heard the happy voice of the old knight in the distance.

* * *

"The month is all but up," said Midge in a worried voice, "and Our Lady hath not yet discharged the debt of the old knight. Dost thou think that Robin Hood will make him pay the four hundred pounds himself if Lady

Mary doth not pay it for him?"

"Do not worry," said Little John smiling at the boy's concern. "The Master is good and kind and will always do what is best. Thou must have faith in him, Midge, as I have. If at some time he seemeth to thee a little hard, it is for some special purpose, mark my words. For instance, should he make the knight pay him the money he oweth, it would perchance be so that the old man would gain a new respect for himself, that he had once more got a footing on life and owed no man a penny."

"But he is too old to begin anew," cried Midge compassionately.

"Wait, boy, until thou seest the day of the new month before thou feelest any anxiety."

So Midge kept silent, but his young heart ached for the old knight who would come to the greenwood in but a few days and find that the Lady had not paid his debt. "Master," the boy burst forth as the next day passed without a sign of the money, "hath Our Lady forgotten the old knight?"

Robin Hood smiled, and taking Midge by the hand, led him to the lodge in the Vale of Peace where he dressed the boy and himself like two friars, with hood, gown, beads, and crucifix. It was the first time that Midge had ever put on such a disguise, and he ran hither and thither among the outlaws, crying, "Wouldst thou know me? Do I look like a boy or a man? Shall I put on a deep voice—so, or talk in a high monotone the way Friar Tuck doth on reading the mass?"

Will Stutely begged the Master to let him dress up too, but Robin Hood said that this was a special message that he and Midge were bearing to the Lady Mary to hurry and discharge the debt of the old knight, and that they knew not how long they must wander about before she would answer them, so the fewer that went along the easier it would be to provide food and comfort on the journey.

But the two had walked only a mile or so when they chanced to spy two lusty priests riding gallantly along. They were ample in body and their faces were round moons, unlined and smooth as babies', with an expression of heavy comfort and self-satisfaction resting upon their features. A jewel glowed at the throat of one of the black gowns, and the other's sleeves were lined with a

rich fur. These features caught the eye of Robin Hood at once and he whispered to little Midge, "Son, these are those men whom Our Lady finds erring, for they spend upon themselves the gold that is given for charity. Perchance they are the bearers of the old knight's debt. Hush! Follow me in all that I do, and have thy sturdy fists clenched ready to give their fat faces a poke should I tell thee to."

"Benedicite," said Robin Hood inclining his head, and seeing from the corner of his eye that Midge was copying him exactly. "Some pity on us take. Cross you my hand with a silver groat for the sake of our dear Lady. We have wandered all day without food or so much as a poor cup of drink."

"Now, by our holy dame," said the priest with the fur-lined sleeves," we never a penny have, for this morning we have been robbed of all that we possessed. Now we are returning home to St. Mary's Abbey to replenish our flat purses."

"Yea," said the other priest, "robbed so that no money at all could we save."

"I am very much afraid," said Robin Hood with a changed countenance, "that you both do lie. I am disposed to see if you tell me the truth."

The two priests dug their heels into their horses and started forth, but Midge seized both animals' tails, and at once the chargers came to a standstill. It was an easy task for strong and sinewy Robin Hood and Midge, who was all muscle and bone, to drag the two fleshy and unconditioned priests to the ground. They sank to their knees like ridiculously fat puppies holding up their two front paws to beg.

"Oh, spare us, friar! Have mercy upon us," they cried in terror, for they liked not the look of cold and steely displeasure on Robin Hood's countenance.

"You said you had no money," he said with a gleam of mischief in his eyes, and then, in a chastened tone, "wherefore, without delay, we three will fall down upon our knees and pray for it. My comrade here will stand over us with his sword to see that none of us leaves the others to do all the praying."

The priests knelt down still further toward the dusty road, and prayed angrily, "Send us, oh, send us, some money to serve our need!"

At times they made little movements toward rising, but Midge pushed them down again relentlessly, and they wrung their hands and wept.

"Mother of God, but my knees are paralyzed," cried one.

Robin Hood sang merrily, and answered their weeping. "What, thy knees hurt thee? They must be soft indeed. Why, I feel as if I knelt upon velvet cushions. But hurry ye! Pray longer! I will arise and stand over ye to keep the flies from buzzing on your bald heads."

For one hour Robin Hood and Midge chattered merrily, and only if one of the priests moved from his position did they pay any attention to the poor praying ecclesiastics, and then they chided them for being restless at prayers and gave them a smart poke back into position.

And at last Robin Hood said, "Let us see, now, what money Heaven hath sent down to us after all this praying."

Robin Hood and Midge searched the priests' pockets and found great packets of gold.

"Now, since ye prayed so heavily for this, ye shall have fifty pounds apiece," said Robin Hood generously, and the two unworthy churchmen could do naught but murmur their thanks as he paid them in their own coin.

They rose from their knees, but each collapsed as a

bent twig collapses when its two ends are let go.

"Oh, the demons are running up and down the calves of my limbs!" cried one.

Midge gave each a gentle boost to his horse, for his

own sturdy legs were aching a little in sympathy.

"Wait," cried Robin Hood, and a look of terror came over the two priests' faces lest this highwayman meant to plague them further. But they willingly obeyed him when he said, "Swear upon this holy grass that ye will never tell lies again which way soever you travel, and that all the days of your lives you will be charitable to the poor. Remember the holy friar and his comrade until your death."

"We cannot forget," moaned the priests as they urged their horses forward, the while they rubbed their poor stiff knees with their fat white hands.

"And now let us see what Our Lady hath given us to pay the poor knight's debt," cried Midge.

Opening the purse, they counted the gold and found that eight hundred pounds lay before them.

"In sooth, our Lady hath paid us double," Robin Hood cried.

They hurried back to the greenwood, and Midge told of their adventure.

"The two priests were from St. Mary's Abbey, so they must have been Our Lady's messengers," the boy said seriously. "I should like to have seen two fat ecclesiastics saying their prayers in the white dust of the highway for an hour in the midday sun," laughed Arthur-a-Bland.

Midge could scarcely wait the three days until the month ended and the old knight returned. He spent all his time climbing the tall trees that served as lookouts. and gazing all over the countryside for a sign of some approaching horseman. He saw the patterns of different colored grains laid out in studded squares - bright green like the suit he wore, the brown of his master's cheeks. the gold of Will Scarlet's curls, the gray of Nicholas, the fat cook's eyes, and far away the dull purples and blues of distance. Finally he saw a white cloud of dust that came nearer and nearer, and to his amazement he saw the old knight riding at the head of a company of men. each bearing arrows and bows gilded until they looked like pure gold. Could this gentle old man be coming to make war upon Robin Hood? Midge knew that men were not always as good as they seemed—that churchmen were not always saintly, that sheriffs did not always uphold the law—but could it be that so gentle and kind a personality covered a disposition of treachery? He caught his breath in a long sob of misery. Slipping down the tree trunk like a young squirrel, the boy dashed through the forest to the grove where Robin Hood lay, his head on his arms, his eyes searching the blue and limitless skies.

"Master, arise quickly. The old knight returneth and with him come men on horses, bearing golden arrows. Can it be that they are here to make war upon us?"

"Jump not to conclusions, boy. Why shouldst thou think such treachery of one whom we aided?"

"But why should he have men and golden weapons today, when a month ago he had not a friend and nary a shilling?" cried the disillusioned Midge.

"We shall see why presently," smiled Robin Hood. Blowing his horn, Robin Hood told each outlaw that obeyed his summons to stand in readiness to greet the old knight. He said no word about having their weapons ready, and Midge in the midst of his distress felt a glow of love for his master that he thought the best of the stranger until the worst was proved.

With cries of welcome the old man, followed by nearly one hundred men, rode into the glade. And, looking at him, Midge could not be sure he was the same knight, for his pale cheeks glowed with health and his sad eyes

were bright with happiness.

"Master," cried the old knight, kneeling before Robin Hood. "Or may I not call thee that?"

"Call me what thou pleasest, but arise and tell me what hath befallen thee."

"I took the money that thou didst lend me," the old knight said, his words tumbling forth with eager haste, "and reached St. Mary's Abbey at nightfall. As I entered the abbey I heard voices, and the first was that of the prior, who said unto the rich abbot, 'But he may come on time, and then his lands will have been sold to someone else.' And I heard the second voice, which was that of the rich abbot, say, 'Nay, he will not come, for his wife lieth ill and he hath no money, and even should he come and ask for grace I will not give it to him. So sell his lands at once to the squire who wisheth them, and bring me the money straightway.' Thou canst imagine my relief that I had reached the abbey in time.

I brought the money to them, and the rich abbot turned pale and stormed at me, but as many were present to see that I had kept my promise to give him the four hundred pounds, there was naught for him to do but to give me my lands."

"And now for thy debt," smiled Robin Hood. "The good Lady hath paid it for thee with interest, and thus the interest shall be thine. Midge, bring the old knight four hundred pounds, and that, friend, leaveth me still the four hundred pounds that I first gave thee, so thy debt is indeed discharged. But who are these men with thee?"

"They are my friends come back to me, sorry for what they have done and willing to help me till my land and make it of value again. Their wives are nursing my sick dame back to health, and because of thee I shall be happy now until I die."

"But what are these arrows for?" asked Little John.

"A present for ye," said the old knight, flushing with happiness. "We have gilded them with our own hands, thinking it might give ye pleasure to have a forest tournament among yourselves, shooting at targets in the dark glades from which the golden arrows would shine brightly forth."

"Indeed I thank thee," said Robin Hood, and each of the outlaws rushed forward to receive a golden arrow

from the friends of the gentle knight.

Then the old knight bade them farewell, and with

cheering and singing his friends led him away.

"Master," said Midge timidly, "did the Virgin really send the money down into the priests' purses after we set them to praying on the road." "Of course not, silly," interrupted Will Stutely. "It was there all the time. Dost thou not remember how the Master made them swear never to lie again? Thou toldest me about it thyself."

"But then, Master, the Lady did not really pay the

debt, did she?" persisted Midge.

"It is this way, lad. The priests belong to St. Mary's Abbey, which is supposed to do good and to give money away to those who need it. Now the rich abbot of St. Mary's should not have forced this poor old knight to pay the four hundred pounds at all, and since he did, it is only right that someone from his own abbey should furnish the money to pay it."

"The world is full of wickedness," said the sensitive boy passionately. "Even the old man's friends came

back to him after he was rich again."

"Hush, boy! Thou art thinking gloomy thoughts," said Robin Hood. "It is true that men often leave those who are in trouble, but I think that they would have returned to the old knight even if he had not got his rich lands back again, if he had not given up everything and started forth alone to the Holy Land, selfishly leaving his sick wife behind him. Learn, little lad, to stick to thy troubles until they are solved, and not to run away from them. And forgive those fickle-minded people who leave a friend and then return to him, for they it is who know not the power of friendship such as we have here in Sherwood Forest."

Midge trudged thoughtfully off by himself to think upon these things that his master told him, while Robin Hood resumed his favorite position on the soft greensward, his head on his arms, his eyes on the limitless blue of heaven, and a tender smile on his lips as he thought of Midge pondering over the philosophy of life and the inconsistency of people. He felt himself old and wise beside the lad, and wondered a little ruefully if there was aught of youth left in his heavily burdened heart. And suddenly, as he looked into the mystery of the sky far above him, he knew that he was as young as Midge.

ROBIN HOOD PLEASES THE QUEEN

Eleanor of Aquitaine looked long and earnestly in her mirror. How bitter to grow old! Seventy years she counted slowly on her long slim fingers, seventy years of more than ordinary glory. Queen of France, then Queen of England, first lady of the Court of Love, that select gathering of the loveliest women of the time, and the star, the flower, the magic dream figure of a hundred songs of the Troubadours, those singing poets of France of higher rank than lowly minstrels.

And now for a little while England lav in her hands -in her slender old parchment-colored hands that had touched the curls of Richard and John when they were little boys. She had been the regent of the throne after Henry's death until Richard was crowned. And now. until Richard should return from the Crusades, she ruled the land. True it was that there were chancellors and friends of the poor weak John who fought like children over the castles and strongholds. But power lay in her bearing. She was the Queen, and, more than that, the mother of the easily led John. It was very simple to make him do as she wished. But as she looked at the wrinkled ivory of her face, where the burnt-out passions had left her eyes dark coals of bitterness, she knew that soon life must end, and then no longer could she rule her sons.

Her reverie ended. The once beautiful face was contorted with anger and brooding. Thoughts racing

through Eleanor's mind seemed almost to ripple beneath the sensitive skin, for waves of color flooded her face and neck. Should she send for Richard to come home, telling him that his weak brother, John, might become a menace in his dogged endeavors to seize the throne? Nay, rather let John proceed with his petty treachery. and then call Richard so that the mischief be caught in the making. The plan seemed to please her. She smiled at her reflection, and sank wearily back upon her silken cushions.

The Queen was listening to the bells of London's church towers, one hundred and thirty-nine of them. chiming in varying harmony. Bells ringing to praise God. to call the people, to congregate the clergy; bells bemoaning the dead, driving away pestilence; and finally, bells to enliven festivals. Thus they rang for others, some silver-throated, small and delicate; others, made of iron or copper, singing deep songs of tragedy. But differently they chimed for her. Those deep tones were the painful beatings of her own heart, slow and heavy after long years of love and life. Those liquid, birdlike little twitterings were the gay songs of those wandering minstrels who had chosen her long ago as their queen, while the swift, low, sobbing bell was the long-remembered cry of pain of that fair poet who had broken his harp into shattered bits when she ordered him away from her.

And Bernart of Ventadorn, never to be forgotten, had gazed at her with solemn, stricken gaze the day when she left Normandy to be crowned Queen of England. "Comfort"-dear "Comfort," he had called her, and he had called her "Aziman," the "Magnet" that drew him to her. And far across the sea his song came to her, plaintive and appealing:

> Would that I the form could take Of a bird: then, flying Through the night, my way I'd make There where she is lying! Lady, see for pity's sake, Your true love is dying, And my heart is like to break With my tears and sighing.

And now no one sang to her-only the bells of the churches of London town. A gentle knock on the door, and her lady-in-waiting entered bearing a little jeweled casket, glowing in the dim light of the Queen's chamber.

"This gift hath come to thee, Your Majesty, borne by a young boy clothed in Lincoln green, well tanned by English suns and winds, looking not roval, vet bearing the stamp of nobility."

"Who sent me this gift?" Queen Eleanor said with sparkling eyes, as she lifted the lid of the little chest and

saw bright jewels smiling back at her.

"I'faith, this was the message the boy bade me give," said the lady-in-waiting, and then repeated slowly as if she had learned a lesson by heart, "Gold taken by bold Robin Hood from the King's harbingers and sent for a present to the Queen."

Queen Eleanor laughed.

"Ah, the fellow! The rude roguish fellow! He stealeth what is mine and giveth it back to me as a present. Thou mayest go," she said rudely to the lady-inwaiting, seizing the little box of jewels which she held.

Alone, she lifted the necklaces and bracelets from their nest and tried them fearfully against her ivory skin. And she found to her joy that the scarlet rubies intensified her whiteness, the sapphire's glow was no more vivid than her glowing eyes. She preened herself like a bird of paradise, moving with stately grace in front of her mirror, made young again. Yea, though Robin Hood had sent her back only what was hers—for in Richard's absence was not all the kingdom hers?—he had given it to her as a present. A present for Eleanor of Aquitaine, a chest of jewels to one who had far richer gems, but a gift that had brought back to her a wondrous rebirth of her youth of coquetry and fame.

She called to her quickly her prettiest page, by name Richard Patrington, a boy as graceful as a young faun, with soft brown curls beneath his satin hat and dreamy gray eyes that looked upon the Queen as if she were some wonderful personage, as indeed she was.

"Come hither, lovely page. Thou must post to Nottingham as quickly as thou canst. Stop at the castle and tell Earl John I wish him to come to London at once. Then ride on to Sherwood Forest, inquiring of one good yeoman or another that can tell thee of Robin Hood. It is the Queen's order that he come at once to London."

Then Queen Eleanor shut the great door of her innermost chamber, and the curious little chambermaids who peered through the keyhole saw her pulling forth gown after gown, holding them against her pale face and then throwing them into a heap upon the floor. And at last they saw her hold up a velvet as blue as the sea. She turned this way and that, toward the light, away from it. And then came a strange weak sound to their listening ears. Queen Eleanor, who was seventy years old, was singing a song of youth.

The little page reached Nottingham and betook himself to an inn, where he called for a bottle of Rhenish wine and drank to the health of his queen. A tall man sat in one corner watching the messenger with interest. He heard the boy say to the innkeeper he would be back presently—that he had a message to deliver to Earl John at once. Certainly in a very little while the boy returned, saying, "If thou pleasest, another bottle of wine, for I am well worn out delivering the Queen's messages, and I have still more to deliver."

Then the tall man in the corner said, "Tell me, sweet page, what is thy business? Or rather what is the Queen's business in this north country? Methought she liked not Nottingham since Earl John took it as his

stronghold."

"I have ridden to Nottingham on Her Majesty's business," replied the young page haughtily. "But stay, perchance thou canst help me. I seek one good yeoman named Robin Hood."

"By the good St. Dunstan, Robin Hood is getting in the good graces of the royal family indeed," laughed the tall man. "I myself know the fellow well. At break of day I'll get my horse and together we will ride to bold Robin Hood and all his gay yeomen."

And so just at dawn the little page rode off toward Sherwood Forest, following the guidance of the tall outlaw who said to him, "Thou yawnest with weariness, little fellow. Shut thine eye and sleep. Thy horse will follow mine. What is thy name, should someone stop us and inquire about thee?"

"My name is Richard Patrington," sighed the little page, with his longest yawn of all, "and who art thou? Before I sleep, tell me thy name, and perchance I will dream of thee."

"My name is Little John."

The little page sat up more straight and, opening his heavy eyes wide, surveyed the outlaw's great body. "Little John," he repeated sleepily. "Ah, well, it is a queer place, this Sherwood Forest!"

Then his pretty head drooped, and Little John, touching both of their horses lightly with his hand, set forth, leading the way into the glades of Robin Hood. And though he had let the little page sleep out of sympathy, it was partly out of caution that he did not awaken him until they were in the midst of the outlaws, for after all it might not be wise to let a messenger of the court see the windings of the maze of pathways that led into the Vale of Peace.

"Hi, ho," they shook the boy merrily, and finally he opened his great eyes, still misty with dreams, and surveyed stupidly the circle of men in Lincoln green.

"Where am I?" he sighed as the awakening child sighs in wonder as he leaves the world of sleep.

"Thou art in Sherwood Forest, and in the presence of the noble Robin Hood," said Little John.

Instantly the boy fell down on his knees and, doffing his round satin hat, said very politely, "Queen Eleanor greets thee well by me. She bids thee post at once to fair London court, for there a bit of gayety awaiteth thee. Have no fear of any trick or treachery, for the Queen will tell no one who thou truly art, and she wisheth to make sport with certain of the nobility by enlisting thee in an archery match against the best archers in the kingdom."

So Robin Hood dressed his men in Lincoln green and himself in scarlet, and, to lend a disguise, each outlaw wore a black hat with a waving white feather in it, and they might well have been a company of yeomen enlisted in the guards of the court itself, instead of yeomen living under the blue sky. And they sported themselves about, doffing their hats, lifting their heads high, matching their conduct to their rich attire.

As they neared London town, the outlaws could scarcely contain their excitement.

"Never," quoth Will Stutely, "have I been to London since I've been born. I think of it, Master, much as I used to think of heaven, paved in gold and studded with jewels. Tell me quickly, Master, what it is truly like, lest I be disappointed."

"Thou wouldst not like London, or heaven either, lad, to be streets of gold. Thou wouldst have to wear thy Sunday best to keep in tune with it. London is the city of adventure. Thou canst search all day and never find all its secret places. Before we go to the palace we will go exploring and thou shalt learn a little of the mystery of the great city."

So Robin Hood and the outlaws invaded London town and sought out each nook and cranny. On the south they found great walls and towers, half worn away by the ceaseless ebb and flow of the River Thames. To the east rose the White Tower, whose court and walls, rising from a deep foundation, overlooked the surrounding roofs and gables.

"Midge, it is the strongest fort thou hast ever seen," said Friar Tuck. "Even the mortar between yon stones is tempered with the blood of beasts."

But before Midge could exclaim in wonder, he had been hurried on through winding streets where houses pushed out their gabled fronts, where gardens extended far beyond the line of roofs, where warehouses stood back, often facing completely the opposite way of the houses, creating an appearance of such irregularity that the outlaws thought it much more confusing than the glades of Sherwood thick with undergrowth.

On the west side of the city they found two castles called Baynard and Montfichet, and the wall of the city broken by seven gates, called Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Cripplegate, Aldersgate, Newgate, Ludgate, Bridgegate. Turrets rose from the wall to the north, and in some places the stone was of double thickness. They passed the manors belonging to famous men of the time, with many of whom Will Scarlet's father, Earl Gamwell, was well acquainted, so that the fair outlaw named them for his ever-curious fellows.

"There liveth Bukerel; next in order are Orgar, Aylwyn, Ansgar, Lard, Farringdon, Haverhill, Basing, Horne, and Algar."

"Farringdon is the nicest name," said Will Stutely.

"But Horne is the richest noble," said Sawney, the Scotchman.

"Haverhill hath a nice sound," Arthur-a-Bland insisted.

But again Robin Hood hurried them along, for he wished to reach the palace to see what the Queen wished of him. They hurried past the little clusters of villages with parish churches of simple wood, in strange contrast to the impressive cathedral of St. Paul's, a low structure with thick pillars and round arched windows filled with

glass of rich color and design. And in certain parts were all the smithies; and in others, the ironmongers; and together were all goldsmith and furniture shops, for the guilds forced men of the same trade to put their shops in allotted squares, each trade apart from the next.

At last they followed the river bank some two miles and found the king's palace, a majestic building reaching high toward the heavens, well protected by bulwarks, and yet surrounded by groves of trees and wonderful

gardens.

Robin Hood went before the Queen and fell on his knees reverently, for much as he disliked the deeds of the French, he found great pleasure in many Frenchmen, as his long stay in Normandy in the days of his youth had left its mark upon him. He looked into the face of the Oueen and felt amazed that the glow of life that sparkled there was not the reflection of a young heart, but of one seventy years old. He who loved pictures caught the scene and engraved it upon his memorya tall and stately queen in wondrous velvet cloth of blue, the deep blue of gentians, of the sea on a still day. He saw not the yellow parchment skin, wrinkled with age, but only a blurred image of old ivory with dark flashing eyes in pleasing contrast. For a magic moment he felt the wonder of Eleanor of Aquitaine, even as men had felt it for half a century.

"Thou with all thy yeomen art welcome, Locksley," said the Queen, and Robin Hood knew that she must be giving him that name to hide who he really was. "Earl John awaiteth thee in Finsbury Field, near Moorfields, a suburb of London."

"Awaiteth me?" said Robin Hood in a mystified voice.

"Yea, but listen until I am done," said Eleanor of Aquitaine in the dominating manner for which she was famous. "Without Mooregate is a great plain field for archers to shoot upon. Here at measured distances are marks set for targets, and here archers of the court await thee. Earl John hath wagered many times with me that these archers of the court can outshoot all men in England. I have never called his wager, but now that I have thought of thee and all thy brave men, I take a keen interest in the contest. Go thou to Finsbury Field, but tell no one who thou art. I follow thee with all due speed."

And, truly, as soon as the outlaws arrived at the plain the Queen was there, for she had told her coachmen to urge the horses to their fullest speed, as she did not wish to miss a moment of the play she had brought about. Earl John stood indolently leaning against a great tree, kicking the ground impatiently with his heel, for he liked not to be called to London town for a mere wager with the Oueen, and had she not been his mother and the mother of Richard, perchance he would have found excuse. But, like others of England, he feared this energetic old lady and hastened to obey her wishes. As he stood by the tree, the sunlight full on his handsome face, Robin Hood caught a glimpse of Eleanor of Aquitaine's dark, commanding eyes, and for a moment feared that perchance John had some of his mother's strength. Then indeed he would be an enemy. But looking again at the pleasant face, he saw that the weak mouth belied all the hidden power that lay in the man's dark eyes. It was Richard the Lion Hearted who had inherited his mother's vitality and power.

"Come hither, Tepus," said John to a bow-bearer. "Measure me out with this line how long our mark must be."

"What is thy wager?" asked the Queen.

"Three hundred tuns of Rhenish wine, three hundred tuns of beer, and three hundred of the fattest harts that run on Dallom Lea. A princely wager, dear Queen, and one I fear not to offer, so great is my faith in the archers of the king's court."

"Measure no marks for us, most sovereign liege," said Robin Hood gayly. "We'll shoot at the sun and moon, and our arrows shall pierce the smile of the old man who lives up there."

Earl John looked at him in amused contempt, and gave directions without answering him, "Full fifteen score your mark shall be."

"I'll lay my bow, I'll cleave the willow wand," cried Midge excitedly.

Then the three archers of the king's court came forth, clad in a royal purple. They tossed their dark hair over their shoulders, and carelessly they aimed at the willow wand. All of them hit it, but none struck the rod asunder, nor did any strike the small piece of wood in the center of the target called the prick, the aim of all master archers. Still, each shot had touched the wand, so that the Earl's men had counted three for their side, and Robin Hood, Little John, and Midge had not yet shot, so none knew whether they could equal the shots or not.

"Is there any knight of the privy council that will join Queen Eleanor in her wager before we have seen these yeomen shoot? Come, Sir Richard Lee, thou art a knight of good pedigree, sprung from Gower's blood. Have some sport and match Earl John's wager with three tuns of—"

But Richard Lee had disappeared even as the Queen spoke.

"Why, it is the Bishop of Hereford I see. Come hither, noble priest," smiled Eleanor mischievously.

"By my silver miter," said the bishop, "I'll not bet one penny, for all the world knoweth that the king's archers are of excellent aim, while these men be strangers, and no one knoweth what they are like."

"What wilt thou wager against our winning?" said Robin Hood to the bishop.

"By my silver miter, all the money within my purse," said the bishop scornfully.

"What is in thy purse?" said Robin Hood. "I myself will wager with thee."

"Fifteen score nobles, nearly a hundred pound," said the bishop.

Will Scarlet, shaking with laughter, hid behind one of the great oak trees, for well he knew that once more the Bishop of Hereford would be relieved of his gold.

Then shot Robin Hood, Little John, and Midge, and they equaled the king's archers but did little better, so that the score was now three to three. But that was so much better than the people expected that they sat quite silent and did not jeer as they had been ready to do after the yeomen's shots. Without a word the king's archers came forward and shot their next three, and again they hit the willow wand but came not near the prick itself, nor did they cleave the willow wand. But the great crowd cheered them mightily, for their six shots had been excellent, if not spectacular, and as the bishop said,

"'Twas better to have six shots that counted than four that counted not at all, and two that counted double for their skill."

No one made a sound as little Midge the miller's son came forward. Before he aimed he looked gayly out of the corner of his blue eyes at his master, and received Robin Hood's gaze of sympathy and encouragement with a happy heart. The boy quivered with excitement. Shooting before the Queen! He, born of humble parentage, in the presence of royalty! He must do his best. In his desire to speed the arrow to its target he shot a little too soon, but even then shot within a finger of the prick itself, and all the people gasped in surprise. Still, the next two shots must be better than that to win for the Queen her wager against the triumphant Earl John of Mortain.

"Little John, save our honor," whispered Midge earnestly. "Oh, would that I could have done better for our master's sake! I thought too much upon mine own honor to be allowed to shoot at all. Do thy best, Little John. We must win for the sake of the good Queen who hath shown our Robin so much courtesy when all the rest of the royal family have been his enemies."

So Little John went forward with Midge's impassioned plea in his ears and something of the spirit of contest in his blood. He aimed deliberately, for Little John was noted for his slowness and carefulness in all that he did. Straight to the center of the target went the arrow and quivered a moment as it pierced the prick itself. Loud were the shouts of the yeomen, and Queen Eleanor leaned forward breathlessly. Before the sigh of wonder had died, Robin Hood had drawn his bow taut and,

almost without aim, it seemed to those who watched, let loose the slender arrow. Whistling through the air, so swift was its flight, it clave the willow wand, splitting the prick asunder and shattering the arrow of Little John that already had pierced the target. Never had the onlookers seen such a shot. They broke into great shouting, for the spirit of the contest had been so intense they forgot on which side they belonged and cheered only for the three strangers who had shot as no other three archers ever had shot before.

"A boon, a boon," cried Queen Eleanor excitedly. "I crave that besides paying me thy wager, John, thou shalt let these yoemen have forty days to come and forty days to go, and three times forty to sport and play before thou seekest them out as friend or foe."

Everyone looked at the Queen in amazement at so strange a request, but when she held forth her hands and called in a laughing musical voice the name of the man who had shot so marvelously, they understood, and drew back in terror.

"Thou art welcome, Robin Hood," said Eleanor, "and so is Little John, and so is Midge, thrice welcome every one."

"Robin Hood!" cried John, paling and trembling all over. "Why, I thought that he was dead! Sir Guy of Gisborne told me he was slain within the castle gates of Nottingham, far in the north country, many months ago."

"Robin Hood!" moaned the bishop. "Had I known it was that bold outlaw who was to shoot I would not have bet one penny, for I have seen him shoot before."

"And when didst thou see the outlaw Robin Hood shoot?" cried the nobles.

The bishop flushed with anger and humiliation. "He took me one Christmas day and led me to his winter camp in the Popish Hills at Nottingham, and there made me sing mass, Got wot, to him and his yeomanry. He took all my gold, and now he hath taken it again."

Earl John in his mother's presence could do naught but give the Queen the boon she asked, and Robin Hood and his gay outlaws knelt before Her Majesty in laughing

confusion, bidding her a merry farewell.

Eleanor of Aquitaine watched them running away, the whole band of outlaws like frisking kittens at play, like young fawns scampering away from the sound of hunter and horn. And when they had gone from sight, the sparkle left her eyes, and her proud and stately figure drooped wearily. She drove swiftly to the palace and there sought the loneliness of her chamber, where she lay in the dusky evening listening to the bells of London town sing to her, croon over her, troubadours of her old age.

. . .

Earl John waited only until his mother, the Queen, left Finsbury Field before calling together a special guard to ride with him in pursuit of Robin Hood, though he had given his word that the outlaws should go free for many days. He reached his castle at Nottingham without overtaking them. Inquiring of the sheriff of Nottingham and Sir Guy of Gisborne, he found that all the people of the little town were still hiding in their thatchroofed cottages, trembling with fear, for early that morning Robin Hood and his men had galloped through the town, armed to the teeth with bows and arrows and

shouting in wild glee that the townsfolk had taken for a war cry. The Earl, thinking his prey safe in the shelter of Sherwood Forest, spent the night making merry at the castle, dancing with all the maidens of Nottingham, and singing songs of gayety. So it was that the Lady Fitzwalter heard the indiscreet boastings of Earl John as she danced with him the grave, majestic dance called the pavone, named after the peacock, since the long satin trains covered with jewels as brilliant as peacock feathers lay outstretched on the dance floor as the lady followed the steps of the gentleman in a gentle swaying motion.

"No more shall Nottingham shiver and quake at the sound of the name of Robin Hood," said the Earl of Mortain.

"What meanest thou? He is not dead?" cried Maid Marian sharply. And those who heard thought that the strange tone of her voice was an expression of relief, while in truth it was a cry of terror.

"Nay, but he shall soon be slain, hunted down in his own lair, surprised in his own thickets. Tomorrow he hangs," said Earl John dramatically.

And so it was that a young page clothed in Maid Marian's own dark cloak of velvet and rich furs, scampered away at her bidding, bearing a small note in her own handwriting.

"I know not if thou canst find the groves where Robin Hood dwelleth," she said to the little page who watched her with adoring eyes. "But follow the road from Nottingham and if thou seest anyone in Lincoln green, give him this message. And if thou seest no one, bring the message safely back to me before dawn that I may go myself to deliver it."

For many miles the little page trudged along, and finally when the moon came up and the shadows on the road seemed to be reaching their long arms out to seize him, he heard the merry voices of men behind a grove of trees. Creeping close to them, the little page saw a strangely assorted group of men beside a roaring fire, eating a roasted fowl, brown and savory, and singing whole-heartedly in chorus:

Time was my wings were my delight, Time was I made a lovely sight; 'Twas when I was a swan snow-white.

The baster turns me on the spit, The fire, I've felt the force of it, The carver carves me bit by bit.

I'd rather in the water float Under the bare heavens like a boat, Than have this pepper down my throat.

Whiter I was than wool or snow, Fairer than any bird I know; Now am I blacker than a crow.

Now in the gravy dish I lie, I cannot swim, I cannot fly, Nothing but gnashing teeth I spy.

The little page giggled outright at this sad song of the roasted swan. The outlaws jumped up, seizing their swords, but quickly dropped them as they saw the small boy with the lady's velvet cloak pulled about him.

"Art thou eloping, fair damsel?" said Friar Tuck, pretending to think he was a maiden.

"I am not a girl," cried the little page. "I have brought a message to any fellow who weareth Lincoln green. That is what the lady said."

"So a lady is writing me love letters at last," smiled Friar Tuck with a gloating look at his companions.

"Nay, indeed nay, she will write love letters to none, I have heard," replied the young boy.

"She must be Lady Fitzwalter," grinned Will Scarlet.

"Why, she is," replied the boy, surprised that they should know from whom he came before he had told them.

"Then it is my letter," cried Will Scarlet, leaping to his feet in haste, and causing his fellows much merriment. But they let him open the note, and saw him first flush and then grow very pale.

"Hark ye, this is what the note sayeth: 'Robin Hood: Earl John with a great guard of men cometh to capture thee on the morrow. Fly, for he meaneth to chase thee wherever thou goest, and hath already followed thee from London, as thou wilt see when I tell thee that tonight he is making merry at Nottingham Castle. This message is from one who hath remembered since long ago a ride upon thy shoulder!"

"Marry, she is indeed in earnest if she dare not sign her own name, yet desireth me to understand that a friend writeth the letter," said Robin Hood soberly. "Ready, at once, Little John. We will travel alone, leaving the rest of ye here to throw them off our trail and hinder them as long as ye are able. Let there be no slaying, but only play at battle. Remember, I have vowed that we shall shed no mortal blood. Take good care of yon page, and send him back to Lady Fitzwalter bearing the thanks of Robin Hood, saying that soon we shall hope to repay the maiden's kindness." The outlaws watched them depart with a vague misgiving in their hearts—Little John and Robin Hood, the dearest and most valued of all the outlaws. They prayed silently that no harm would come to them.

"Hast thou any plan, Master?" asked Little John.

"Ah, one that will afford us much pleasure," laughed Robin Hood.

"Speak not lightly, Master. Pleasure, when the hunter is upon thy trail?" said Little John reproachfully.

"Good cheer, comrade! I shall leave a trail so plain that even Earl John will follow it, but swifter than he will we fly, and then—but wait and see what shall happen."

Little John was completely mystified but he said not a word, knowing that Robin Hood knew best what to do, and that perchance there could be pleasure in the chase, if no harm came to his master. Then began a hunt such as Little John had never seen before, where the hunted left clues for the hunter at every turn.

"First we shall go to Robin Hood's Bay, for there I have a young friend, one Peter Clifton who lives in Whitby town, whom I promised several years ago to come to some day."

"Art thou mad, Master? I heard thee telling Midge that he should tell Earl John that a fox had more than one hiding hole, though he often made the mistake of naming them too openly. Earl John will think at once of Robin Hood's Bay and Yorkshire."

"That is what I hope, at least, Little John," said Robin Hood with a smile, "for what is the sport of being chased if the hunter be not close to thy heels? Still I have not great faith in Earl John's wits. He may not even think of Robin Hood's Bay, though I am told that all England considers that a place of refuge I have chosen for myself should I ever be in danger."

Little John kept silent, for he knew not what to say when his master set forth on a journey of folly. Reaching Whitby, they dined at the abbey with the abbot Richard. After dinner many of the monks who had heard of their fame as archers took the outlaws outside the abbey and begged them to shoot for them. So they asked to be taken to the top of the abbey that they might shoot from a great height and better see the distance, and Robin Hood whispered to Little John, "This is our next clue; shoot southward, for we are going to retrace our steps toward Derbyshire."

So the outlaws aimed southward, and when the abbot ran forth with the monks they could find naught of the arrows, though they looked a half a mile to the south. As they were despairing, they saw a slim boyish figure running like a deer toward them. In his hand he bore the feather from an arrow, but on seeing Robin Hood he dropped it and fell to his knees. "Master, dost thou remember me? I am Peter Clifton whom thou didst speak to many years ago, telling me to wait until I became a man before I joined thee. I saw this arrow flying through the air as I walked along the road and knew somehow that thou hadst returned."

"But where did the arrow alight?" inquired the abbot.

"Follow me," cried Clifton.

And when they came to the fields where the arrows had fallen, they found that each measured a full mile

from the Abbey of Whitby, and the abbot cried out in amazement and said, "We shall build two pillars here in memorial thereof, and one field shall be called henceforth Robin Hood's Field, and the other John's Field."

"That shall be as thou wishest," said Robin Hood. "Only this I ask of thee, should the Queen or any of the royal family come to Whitby town within the next few days and ask for me, tell them of this, for I like them to know that I shoot other places besides the forest of Sherwood."

The abbot agreed to this strange request.

"Master, have I waited long enough?" whispered young Peter Clifton eagerly.

"Can thy father spare thee?" said Robin Hood.

"My father went to sea and never returned. Is it not so, Abbot Richard?" said the boy sadly. "Out with the ebb tide his boat went, and we knew then he would never return, for what goeth out with the sea never comes back."

"And thy mother, lad?" said Robin Hood gently.

"She hath a little cottage with her mother, and she knoweth my desire to go with thee. She hath promised me that I may join thee when thou lettest me."

"Very well, then," said Robin Hood. "Run quickly and bid her farewell. Little John and I have a long trip

before us, and we are in great haste."

So it was that the three left Whitby town, and when, a few days later, the Earl of Mortain came galloping up to the door of the abbey, inquiring if Robin Hood had come that way, the Abbot Richard said yes, and at once told him the wondrous story of the outlaws' shooting.

"And which way did they go?" cried Earl John.

"Why, Robin Hood's Field lieth to the southward, and the last I saw of them they were there," said the abbot. And Earl John and all his men galloped southward on the trail of the outlaw, but none of them realized that that was just what Robin Hood wished them to do.

Now Robin Hood told Peter Clifton of the chase, and great zest was added to their trip.

"But why are we returning toward Sherwood?" inquired Little John, sorely perplexed.

"What is nicer than making Earl John face all the people of Nottingham to whom he boasted we should be caught?"

All along the way Robin Hood left messages, and when they reached a point about four miles north of the town of Doncaster and about a quarter of a mile from Skelbrough and Bourwallis, they stopped to drink at an old spring. Taking a piece of chalk, they wrote in large letters, "Robin Hood's Well," so that Earl John would know they had just come that way. And the letters stayed until the angry John arrived, and he washed them away bitterly with the spring water. But somehow the name still stayed, and when, a few years later, it behooved the wealthy Lord Carlisle to build a stone arch over the well, it was called Robin Hood's Well again, and so it has been always.

By now the Earl and his guard were hot and tired, but their weariness was naught to their fury, which welled in their hearts and bubbled fiercely at each new clue the outlaw gave them.

When Robin Hood reached the sandstone caves of Derbyshire, very near to those of Nottingham, he said to certain natives of a village nearby that they must keep away from the caves the next winter because it had been decreed by the Queen that the outlaw Robin Hood and his merry men were to be held captive there. And at once the rumor spread, and all the people of Derbyshire were proud to think that the outlaw was to be imprisoned among them, and secretly they agreed to help him, for they admired him for his generosity and humbleness. And though this was not quite so, still Robin Hood let them spread the rumor, saying, "Call yonder hills Robin Hood Hills and then everyone will be afraid to go near." This they did, so that when the Earl reached Derbyshire, hot on the trail of the elusive outlaw, he was greeted on all sides by this amazing story of Robin Hood Hills, and knew that his prey had passed that way not long before.

And then the trail led back to Sherwood, through Nottingham, and to the utter amazement of John, toward

London.

Great was the surprise of Queen Eleanor when Robin Hood came and knelt once more before her throne.

"If it please Your Majesty, I have come to speak with Earl John," said Robin Hood without a smile.

"Why, Earl John hath gone to Sherwood, and he said on his departure that he went to seek one Robin Hood," said the mystified Queen.

"Then fare-thee-well, my gracious Queen. I go to Sherwood at once to see what Earl John wishes with me."

And scarce an hour later Earl John returned to his mother's castle, exhausted, hot, and weak with anger.

"Welcome home, John. The archer, Robin Hood hath been to seek thee in person."

"Seek me! Seek me!" shouted John in fury. "When I have sought him these full three weeks. Oh, what a

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cunning knave! And Sir Guy of Gisborne thinketh to overcome him! Ah, none can vanquish him."

"A boon, John. Give him his life and seek not strife with him. I know that thy father, Henry II, regarded him as a dangerous foe, but after all, what harm doth he do thee?"

"What harm? I wonder," said Earl John seriously, and he gazed at the throne, Richard's throne in the keeping of his mother, the throne he desired for himself so passionately. And the shadow of the outlaw Robin Hood seemed to lurk behind it.

ROBIN HOOD BAITS THE SHERIFF WITH THE AID OF A POTTER

Robin Hood and Little John had nearly forgotten young Peter Clifton during the merry chase round about England followed by Earl John. But now as they left London safely behind them and turned toward Sherwood, the boy, who had kept marvelously still through the whole journey, began to ask eager questions.

"Tell me, Master, are there any young outlaws? Not," he added politely, flushing a little, "that you and Little John are old, Master—I like ye old—and besides,"

he floundered miserably, "ye aren't old."

Robin Hood threw back his splendidly shaped head and laughed heartily. "Thou art as bad as Midge when he tries to pay me a compliment. Yea, lad, there are several as young as thee. Will Stutely, who is the best-hearted boy in the world, but who is forever getting lost and frightening us all to death; and Midge, the miller's son who came to live with us when he was very young and who hath grown up among us, learning all that he knoweth of nobility and religion and the early elements of learning. His good father hath let him stay among us, knowing it is a far better life for his son than would be the mere grinding of flour all day long, though I think that perchance the father could do well with the boy's aid."

"Will they teach me things?" asked Peter wistfully. "Thou knowest, Robin, I know naught of the forest.

Whitby is a fishing village. All our thoughts turn to the sea. There is never a day that we do not whisper a prayer to the Virgin, who is called 'Stella Maris' by the mariners. 'Star of the Sea' it meaneth, Master, for that is what she is, lighting the tempest-darkened waves and lighting men's hearts dark with the fear of death. I shall miss the sea, rather. Our eyes turn to it daily. If the waters are gray as an icicle, it is that much harder to be gay. But if the sun changes the waves into dancing fires, I would run and dance and sing with joy. And that, thou must know, we cannot do in Whitby town."

"And why canst thou not dance and sing?" said Robin Hood.

"There is too much grief, Master. Some one is always looking out to sea for a ship that has gone out toward that treeless horizon and hath never returned. Most of us in Whitby turn to the sea when we are but children, and after thou hast watched it awhile, Master, thou canst never turn thine eyes away. When it roars, thy heart standeth still. And even when it is very calm it is hard to smile, because no one in Whitby town ever smiles at the sea. And those of us who cannot stand its dangers become monks in the great abbey and try to be happy, as the good Stella Maris wishes us to be."

"It is good, lad, to love the forest for a while. It hath not the fierce hold upon thee that gray waters have, but it is a soothing, gentle surrounding of soft winds kissing thy cheeks and sunlight turning thy hair to gold. And thou wilt learn to laugh from Friar Tuck, who laughs not only with his voice, but with streaming eyes and nose and shaking body, with dancing feet and hands

crossed upon his ample waist, rocking and leaping and moaning with the pain of it."

"A friar, thou sayest?" said Peter in shocked amaze-

ment.

"A friar with a heart of gold instead of a purse of gold, as most of the clergy have this day," said Little John.

"Name some of their names for me," pleaded Peter.
"I should like to know them a little before I see them all

at once."

"There is Will Scarlet, who weareth fine clothes only because he liketh them and not because he is proud, and Sawney the Scotchman who weareth rags not because he is poor but because he doth not wish to become poor. Allina-Dale and his lovely wife Laurel, who only visit us once in a great while, but who have promised to come to us if ever we need their aid; Arthur-a-Bland, who belongeth to that same splendid family that Little John cometh from. And we have the best cook in the country, even if he did come from the sheriff of Nottingham's house. fat jolly Nicholas, a companion picture of Friar Tuck himself. Thou wilt love them all, each for his own humor, and though one may be a little stingy, another a little sharp of speech, all men must have two sides to their natures, and I'faith if they hadn't, we should indeed grow mightily tired of eternal cheerfulness."

After this speech Robin lapsed into a dreamy silence, and the other two knew he was thinking tenderly of his loyal band of outlaws. They rode over the white hills swiftly, and when night fell they had neared the outskirts of Sherwood. Peter felt his heart pound as they entered the deep glades. He knew not what he expected,

but his whole body was attuned to the fulfillment of his wish to join Robin Hood. The continuous chorus of birds was surging, unrestful music to his unaccustomed ears. One moment it lifted him to ecstasy, the next the nameless twitterings were like the incessant voices of old men and women chattering without an end. Even as men who first go to the sea can hear only its distant roar and wish to escape it, so the boy thought as he rode through the glades that he must cover his ears to stop the murmurous sound of the forest.

"Think of the sea," he heard Robin Hood's voice murmur.

"How didst thou know I had grown lonely for its sound?" asked the boy in wonder.

"Long ago I came from Canterbury, and I longed for the accustomed silences broken only by the deep intoning of bells. The presence of these forest creatures seized upon my mind and I lived with them and not with my dreams until I hated them for intruding. But this was only for a day or so. I thought of the deep silences of Canterbury and they filled my days. Silences lie only in thy mind, lad, so call them to thee when thou wishest. Shouldst thou grow homesick for the sound of the sea, think upon it, and soon thine ears will ring with its resoundings even as a shell rings when you listen."

Then the roaring fire from the camp met their eyes, and they came upon the outlaws, dark silhouettes against the flames, faces in the shadows, faces in the red light, all laughing, all turned eagerly to their master.

"This is young Peter Clifton from Whitby town, of whom I have told you," said Robin Hood. "He hath come to join us." Midge looked at the newcomer with a startled expression, half jealous, half friendly. Turning, he saw his master regarding him with steady, loving eyes, and he pushed the feeling of jealousy swiftly from his heart and said in his pleasantest voice, "You and I shall be the youngest together, instead of me alone. We must protect each other from the teasing of Friar Tuck."

"Yea, I like nothing better than to tease a nice, fat,

juicy boy," said the Friar, smacking his lips.

"As if we were chickens!" giggled Midge.

"I really know naught of the forest. Wouldst thou be kind enough to teach me, Midge?" said Peter shyly.

And the last thing Robin Hood heard of the two

youngest outlaws that night was:

"Upon my word, Peter, thou hast never hunted? Really?"

"Nay, I have only fished. Hast thou ever fished?"

"Well, no, not in the sea. But hark ye, thou must know about hunting. Dost thou know the seasons for hunting?"

"Nay, I know naught," said the other forlornly.

"Well, now listen well, and I shall tell thee. From Midsummer to Holyrood day is the 'time of grace' when we may hunt as we will. From the Nativity to the Annunciation of our Lady, we may hunt the fox. From Easter to Michaelmas, the roebuck; from Michaelmas to Candlemas, the roe; from Michaelmas to Midsummer, the hare; from the Nativity to the Purification of our Lady, the wolf, fox, and boar. And hark ye once more, and then thou wilt know all thou needest to about hunting. These are the beasts of hunting; those to be shot for food, the hare, hart, wolf, and wild boar. And these are

the beasts of the chase, some for food when they are caught, but mostly for the fun of catching, since they are elusive and swift and need grayhounds upon their trail; the buck, doe, fox, and roe. And lastly, the beasts for sport, which mean they are not to be eaten but are to be caught for the vigorous exercise of the catching, and they are the badger, the otter, and the wild cat."

"And won't the Normans put a heavy fine upon us if they catch us hunting?" said Peter. "I have heard that if they find a grayhound hunting they cut off its left paw, if its owner cannot pay the fine to redeem the good dog. I could not bear to have a dog hurt."

"No Normans come near Sherwood. They are afraid of Robin Hood, for he is the king of the forest. And thou must truly realize, Peter, that such as you and I are indeed fortunate to be able to be in his outlaw band." Midge ended with the air of a father informing his young son of his blessings.

Daylight came. It was just like any other day for the outlaws, but to Peter Clifton, accustomed to the gray of northern skies and the frequent storms at sea, the golden sun was like a warm cloak about his shoulders. The morning was not far gone when in the distance the outlaws saw a small cart approaching, pulled by a bony horse and driven by a potter.

"Faith, but that is a proud potter. He feareth naught, passing this way each day, and never doth he pay toll for using the highway," said Little John.

"Go thou, Little John, and cry 'Hold!' to him and exact forty shillings from him," said Robin Hood idly.

"Nay, Master, I am willing to bet thee forty shillings that none of us could make the potter pay the toll."

Robin Hood looked at Little John in amazement, first because he had disobeyed an order and second because he had shown such weakness. "Come, Little John, thou wouldst not let such a man as he defeat thee. I will willingly take thy bet and go forth myself to collect the toll from him."

Little John said not a word, but beckoned the others to hide with him in the thickets that they might witness the encounter unseen.

Robin Hood stepped into the path of the bony horse and looked into the face of the potter, an indolent swarthy man with heavy-lidded eyes that gave him an appearance of sleepiness.

"My man, for three years thou hast passed this way without paying toll. I call upon thee for forty shillings at once, far less than thou owest."

"Who art thou? And whoever thou art, away!" said the potter in a rhythmical monotonous voice that

matched his sleepy eyes.

"My name is Robin Hood, and I cry thee hold. Hand forth the forty shillings—" But Robin Hood never finished the sentence. To his utter amazement, the potter sprang upon him like a wild beast suddenly aroused from slumber. With a heavy staff he knocked the buckler in Robin Hood's hand to the ground. As Robin Hood stooped lithely for it, the potter struck his foe a crack upon the neck, certainly an unworthy attack upon his unprepared opponent. Robin Hood fell to the ground and looked into the yellow tigerish eyes of the potter in intense surprise.

"By my faith, thou art all they said thou wert," he murmured.

The potter looked surprised in his turn, even as every man that had ever beaten Robin Hood in hand to hand encounter felt amazed. Who was this handsome and splendid fellow who so easily challenged those he met to combat and who was easily and sorely drubbed by him he challenged? Long after, the potter remembered the winning smile of the man who lay on the ground and heard his well-spoken words of praise for his opponent.

Then suddenly men poured forth from the thickets and surrounded the two. The potter seized his ugly stick and lifted it to mow down those who molested him, but he heard the voice of the man he had already felled,

saying:

"Hold, good potter. We were merely trying thy strength for a wager, and I have lost my forty shillings to Little John, who vowed that thou couldst win. I'faith, Little John, if it were a hundred shillings we had wagered, they would all be thine. I feel, indeed, that crack upon my neck was well worth one hundred shillings."

The potter moved uncomfortably toward his cart. It wasn't such a victory after all when the man one had

vanquished laughed about it.

"Hold once more, good potter," came the merry voice of the outlaw chief. "Stay thou here while I take thy pots to Nottingham and sell them for thee. I will dress in thy clothes and thou in mine, and Friar Tuck and Will Stutely will amuse thee and give thee roast venison and good ale while I am gone."

"Master, be well 'ware of the sheriff of Nottingham for thou knowest he is little our friend, and especially since my visit to him he is wary of strangers," said Little

John seriously.

"See that thou dost not sell these pots too cheaply," warned the potter.

"Nay, good potter, and no matter for what I sell them, thou shalt have their full value from me when I return."

They saw him go, their chief who always looked so clean and neat, clad in the dusty black of the potter's cloak, lazily guiding the bony horse and seeming to sleep to the tune of the pots that clattered together most unmusically.

Robin Hood followed along the well-known way to Nottingham, over fords, wide stretches of wood, downs dotted with sheep, meadowland and valley, bridlepaths and highway. At last he saw the castle of Nottingham, its high walls and towers far above the treetops, the hated banner of Earl John waving from the donjon tower. He passed through the streets of the little town, thick with overhanging gables and penthouses. The guildhall, the church of St. Mary's, manor houses with moats like that surrounding the castle itself, and the heavily timbered houses of the wealthy lords and village officials. And as the creaking wagon and the awkward horse proceeded through the town, the voice of the outlaw rose high toward the windows of the cottages where housewives peered forth, crying in a loud nasal tone. "Pots. pots, greatly cheap, pots!"

And when he had said the word "cheap" all the young housewives hurried forth, eager to see if he spoke the truth, and all the old housewives laughed, thinking that he called "cheap" only to lure his customers forth from their little homesteads.

"Threepence," he said politely, and then indeed did all the old housewives come running forth too, for were

not they the very same pots that were always sold for fivepence?

"He hath not been a potter long," they whispered wisely, as they seized two and three pots apiece in their fair white hands.

Then when Robin Hood had just five pots left, he drove off and would sell no more. Reaching the sheriff's house, he knocked at the door and gave the pots to a little wench there, saying that they were to be given to the sheriff's wife.

Then the sheriff's wife came to thank him most courteously, and she said:

"Gramercy, sir, when thou comest to this country again, I will buy of thee."

"Nay, good dame, thou shalt always have of the best from me, but never shalt thou buy," said Robin Hood.

"Now come at once and dine with us," offered the sheriff's wife, highly flattered at this potter's attentions.

She took him before the sheriff himself, and Robin Hood thought that she looked somewhat frightened of the red-faced little gnome.

"Look what the potter hath given you and me, five pots of the nicest size."

"Ah, he is welcome. Let us go to meat. And thou, potter, come with us to the dining hall," said the sheriff, for he liked well to get something for nothing, and thought that by letting the fellow share some of their bread, he might some day reap more things of value from him.

And when they came into the dining hall, Robin Hood's heart almost stood still, for there were Sir Guy of Gisborne and the gay and debonair Roger de Lacy already at the table, a strangely assorted pair indeed.

"This man hath done me a great favor," said the sheriff, rubbing his hands together in embarrassment. "I have asked him to have meat with us, but I shall put him in the kitchen to eat with the servants, Sir Guy."

"Nay, nay, do not bother. Sit down all of ye, we

are waiting," said Sir Guy crossly.

"But we have not waited," smiled De Lacy. Though his food was still untouched, Sir Guy had already eaten half his plateful.

Sir Guy looked at him angrily, but turning the conversation, he said, "I'faith, dost thou remember the archery match held in London at Finsbury Field for the Queen and Earl John?"

"Robin Hood!" shivered the sheriff.

"Yea, Robin Hood, Little John, and Midge the miller's son, and they say that Earl John chased them all over England and that they are laughing merrily again in Sherwood Forest over the prank they played."

"By the good St. Dunstan," interrupted the potter suddenly, "I saw the match at Finsbury Field myself, and such an archer as this fellow Robin Hood I ne'er expect to see again until I die."

"Thou meanest that thou didst see Robin Hood himself?" said the sheriff.

"Certainly, I stood within a stone's throw of him and watched the way he smiled and shot without even aiming, hitting the prick, the arrow of him who had shot before, and splitting the willow wand asunder, all at once."

"Thou wouldst know him shouldst thou see him

again?" inquired the sheriff eagerly.

"I should know him better than myself," said the potter firmly.

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"Then forth we shall go, Sir Guy and De Lacy, and capture the bird."

"I have much to do," said Sir Guy. "I fear I shall not be able to accompany thee."

"I should be of no help," smiled De Lacy—and Robin Hood almost smiled too, for did not Roger De Lacy think well of Robin Hood?—"unless I should be of help to Robin Hood by getting in thy way and making thee easy to capture."

"Potter, you and I shall go to Sherwood. And I shall not try to capture Robin Hood. But thou shalt point him out to me, so that I may recognize what he looks like on my next encounter with him and see that he at least is captured, no matter if every other outlaw go free."

So, even as he was, fully dressed in his velvet doublet and hose, with gold in his pocket, the sheriff rushed impulsively from the manor and cried that two horses be brought.

"Nay, I shall ride in my cart and so shalt thou," said the potter firmly, "for if we come riding into Sherwood Forest on thy horses, Robin Hood or some of his band will surely spy us and there may be trouble. He has seen me passing oftentimes along the road and has never stopped me, for he doth not trouble an honest working man."

"It is almost worth being an honest working man for such security," laughed De Lacy.

The sheriff proved interesting company. He was as simple as a child and it was not at all difficult to draw information out of the well of his mind. Robin learned that Richard was quarreling with Philip and other of

the powers of Europe, and that any day England might expect to hear of his capture or death on one of his wild adventures.

Suddenly they heard a deep voice singing:

In summer, when the shawes be sheen And leaves be large and long, It is full merry in fair forest To hear the small birds' song;

To see the deer draw to the dale And leave the hills so hee And find their shade in the leafy green Under the greenwood tree.

"Oh, oh," the sheriff shivered as if with the ague, "we are near—that is the song of some scurvy outlaw. They think that the greenwood is their own, though of course it is the king's land, and they sing songs to it all the day. I think we had best retreat, potter. It was foolhardy of me to dare to come."

"Thou wilt not know Robin Hood anyhow, I'll wager, if we come upon him, so be not afraid," smiled the potter. "It will be like discovering the fruit is bad after it is in the mouth."

"So much the worse," moaned the sheriff. "Think thou how dreadful that would be to meet a man even as insignificant to the eye as thyself, and then find out it is the famous Robin Hood. Ah, it is too foolhardy for us to stay!"

Then the potter fumbled in his cloak and brought forth a horn which he blew with a loud, clear blast, and his mouth curved into a smile as he saw the beads of sweat break out on the sheriff's red face. "So I am insignificant to the eye, am I?" laughed Robin Hood.

At once scurrying footsteps from thicket and down told of the approach of the outlaws. The fat little sheriff collapsed. His round face seemed to grow long before their very eyes, and he tried to pray, but no sound came.

"Relieve him of the heavy gold that he carrieth," said Robin Hood to Little John. "It is far too great a load for one so sickly. See how pale he is, and how he hath fallen into a faint upon the stone. Take off his velvet jacket. He hath a fever perhaps, and the weight of that, too, will wear him out upon his homeward journey."

"Homeward journey!" the sheriff cried, for he had thought to die on a greenwood tree and never see his

manor again.

"Why, of course! Thou didst not think we would let thee live in our sweet forest? There is no room for bugs or frogs or such as thou," cried Will Scarlet, pulling his dainty self out of the reach of the sheriff as if he were an

ugly toad.

"Here is a white palfry that thou mayst ride upon to Nottingham, but it is a gift to thy good dame who asked me to dine. I will know if thou givest it to her. The wind whispers the secrets of Nottingham into mine ear. The birds carry thy naughtiness to me when the nights are dark. The elves and pixies tell me what I need to know."

The sheriff gave the smiling outlaw one look, terrified, unbelieving, and mounted the white palfry. They saw the graceful horse go swiftly from the thicket, and upon its back the fat sheriff seemed indeed a squat little

toad bending forward to clutch the snowy hair of the palfrey's silky mane—his legs so short they could not reach the stirrups.

"Is he not thine enemy?" asked Peter Clifton softly.

"He is not worthy of the title enemy, lad, for that doth imply we have something in common," answered Robin Hood.

"But would it not have been safer to imprison him in some forest thicket or cave?" inquired the boy.

"Nay, the powers of Nottingham are afraid of us now. They would not dare to hang us even if they caught us. They would let us go quickly, eager to get us out of their town, knowing that if they didn't our outlaws would come to our aid and the streets of Nottingham would be dotted with Lincoln green. It has taken us a long time to teach them that, Peter. But the years have passed and they have seen us escape too many times. The Bishop of Hereford fears me, so doth the sheriff. Earl John wonders a little, and is none too sure I am not a strong enemy. But Sir Guy of Gisborne has yet to learn his lesson. Soon must we deal with him, for the sheriff hath told me that Geoffrey, his son, is beginning to bother Maid Marian Fitzwalter. May the day never come when that lovely lady suffereth because of Sir Guy! The day will not come, for Will Scarlet will brandish a sword long before."

"I can kill him, Master?" cried Will Scarlet with blazing eyes.

"Hurry not with thy thoughts of slaying, Will," said Robin Hood calmly. "It is far more important to kill a man's spirit, if it be wicked, than to kill his body. We shall brandish a few swords, sing a few songs, play a few

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pranks, and Sir Guy of Gisborne will be as effectively silenced as if he lay in his grave."

Will Scarlet's sensitive, girlish face flushed, but he bit his lip to hide his anger and, turning his deep blue eyes upon his master, said, "Thou art right, Master, but this waiting is trying. I have learned six songs of love to sing to Lady Fitzwalter. If I never see her, I shall forget them," he added whimsically.

He disappeared into the forest, and they heard his gentle song, wistful and appealing:

Ardently I sigh for A new love, a true love. She's the one I die for!

O nightingale, give over For an hour! In his heart the lover Knows your power.

Ardently I sigh for A new love, a true love, She's the one I die for.

"Who is she?" whispered Peter to Midge

"A lovely lady," whispered Midge.

"Will I ever see her?" said Peter.

"How can I tell, foolish," answered Midge a little loftily, and somewhat in the manner that Will Stutely used to lecture him.

"How much are the pots worth?" they heard Robin Hood ask the potter.

"Four pounds," said the sleepy-eyed potter.

"Then here is ten pound, for this day's adventure hath been well worth while," said Robin Hood kindly. The potter climbed once more upon his cart, lifted the reins from the back of the bony horse, and with a slight yawn said, "Farewell, and thank thee for the good roast."

"Well, now that we have said farewell to the sheriff and the potter," laughed Robin Hood, "let us gather around the fire and sing to the greenwood trees."

Book the sixth



VISITORS TO SHERWOOD

A SHADOW OF LONG AGO

"Master, there are so many newcomers," said Little John, "could not you and Will Scarlet and I go forth for a day and night in search of adventure alone? It would be like days when we first came to thee and we had thee more to ourselves."

"Yes, Master," echoed Will Scarlet. "I' faith, coz, I am of a low heart these days. It seemeth as if time stretcheth over too many of my thoughts. I think of years ahead of me and years behind me, and it seemeth as if all that lay between my birth and death were years."

"Well, well, thou art indeed in a sad frame of mind," chuckled Robin Hood. "Because the saddest thing about thy statement is that it is true. Years are all that lie betwixt a man's birth and death. But as ye wish, both of ye, for ye know that ye are closer to me than the others, since ye have been with me longest and care more about those dreams for England that I cherish than doth the hapless Will Stutely, for instance."

"Let us go to Wakefield, not a half day's journey to the north," said Little John, "for I have heard tell of a pinder there who doth not only do what his work demandeth—collect stray cattle that come upon his lord's grounds—but also any person that crosseth his cornfield he locketh up in the pound with the cows until he considereth him punished enough for his trespassing."

"Excellent! Let us trespass, and let him but try and lock me up with the ill-smelling cattle," said dainty Will, lifting his nose in the air.

So the three comrades set forth, and none was more merry than Robin Hood, and Little John and Will Scarlet rejoiced that they had suggested this pleasant plan.

Nearly at the northern edge of Sherwood they heard the clatter of hoofs in the distance.

"The horsemen riding on the road will see us and challenge us to hold," said Robin Hood. "I feel not in the mood to encounter their sallies. Let us slip through the thickets and find the road again after they have passed."

So they turned their horses into the woods and, chatting together happily, did not notice that they were ascending a gentle incline. They had wandered aimlessly for a few moments when the oak trees began to thin and the top of a hill stood forth prominently.

"By my faith, I have never been in this part of the forest before. Imagine, in all our travels to have missed this lovely spot! Sherwood is as full of surprises as the caves in Castle Rock," said Will Scarlet, galloping eagerly ahead to the crest of the hill.

Only Little John noticed that Robin Hood had paled slightly and viewed the hilltop with some uneasiness.

"What is it, Master? Art thou ill?"

"Come hither. It is the most amazingly beautiful sight. Come quickly," cried Will Scarlet.

Little John hurried to join him and saw in the valley beneath an abbey, rich green woodland crowning the grounds; before it a clear, silver lake. It was Gothic in design, and that part of it that Will Scarlet gazed upon formed a court walled on three sides, and in the center of the court stood a fountain, stone images and carvings decorating it.

"Come away, Will," Little John whispered.

"Why should I come away?" cried Will in a loud, puzzled voice. "It is the loveliest monastery I have seen for many a day, and I am thirsty and hungry both, and where else upon our travels do we eat except at such an inn as this? If I had known of this abbey sooner, I should have stopped every time I went to Doncaster."

"Come away." It was Robin Hood's voice that called, and yet not his voice. Will turned in amazement and saw his master's face gray and old, his eyes dark with emotion and dull with weariness. In the dim glade he looked no longer young.

Without a word Will Scarlet turned his horse and followed Little John and Robin Hood. Although he was still completely mystified, the expression on his master's face had frightened him, and he felt fear rather than curiosity at Robin Hood's actions.

It was Robin Hood who first spoke again, and his voice had lost the strange note, half hysterical, half querulous. Now his words cut the air, cold and stern.

"Will, perchance thou wouldst like to ask why I did not go with thee to you abbey. The name of the monastery is one that I loathe, for it hath a meaning to me that none save a few can understand. Newstead, or Newplace Abbey as it is sometimes called, was founded by Henry II, the bold and calculating father of Richard and John. He built it as a memorial to Thomas à Becket whom he had cruelly murdered. Had I not

been more than an ordinary witness of that murder I might wish to enter the abbey and worship there in honor of the dead saint. But, somehow, I have never been able to set foot within its lovely chapel. Remembering as I do a horseman on a hill . . . my mind wanders. Thou canst not follow my tale if I do not tell thee all. My father took me when I was a little lad to see the great archbishop pass along the road to Canterbury Cathedral. I saw him riding, with silver knights guarding him, with all the people kneeling before him. He looked at me—an odd chance it was. I had strayed from my father and got in his horse's way. I saw his true and kindly eyes. I heard his voice like sad music crying the praise and love of Saxons instead of Normans. And in one hour more he lay dead at the altar of the cathedral, with those who had knelt before him on the road kissing his lifeless hands. The silver knights were gone and in their place stood proud Normans who had obeyed the king's will and murdered him cruelly as he stood trustfully before the Virgin's church. It seemed too terrible a thing when King Henry gave a church for him after such a death. A cathedral cloaked his murder, and now an abbey hides the true manner in which he was killed, for the people trustfully believe that King Henry did not have a hand in the great man's slaving, for if he did, he surely would not have built a great monastery for him."

"Now, Master, I understand why thou hatest even the sound of the abbey's name," said Little John.

"Aye, Master, we will forget it," said Will.

"Take it from my mind's eye—take the picture of a sweet old man lying dead at the altar of Canterbury Cathedral, away. Do not ask me to set foot in Newstead Abbey, comrades."

The momentary sadness wore away. They turned back toward the road to Wakefield and began to meet those countless travelers who whiten the road with dust from their pack horses and dray carts. The shadowy life of Robin Hood at Canterbury, a little Robin instead of a grown man, faded from their minds. They forgot, and stopped only a moment to wonder at so swift a forgetting. Their hearts had throbbed, their eyes had stung with tears, their souls turned sick with pity for that little Saxon boy who had witnessed a tragedy that he could never forget. And now, scarce an hour later, they were nudging each other in glee at the sight of a fat friar trying to mount a horse. But these were the safe rhythms of life, a sad mood broken by laughter, the shadows of long ago banished in the light of the new day.

Passing through a little village, Robin Hood stopped to inquire the way from an old man who sat in his little kitchen garden.

"Which is the path to Wakefield?" asked Robin Hood.

"You know it better than I," the old man grumbled.

"Is he not as cross as a baited bear, though?" whispered Will Scarlet.

But Little John paid no attention and said to the old man, "Why is it thou knowest not the path?"

"Because I have had sore pains in my legs for many long days, and I have never been beyond the end of my walk," said the peasant in a sad whining voice.

Robin Hood threw him a coin.

"Why didst thou do that, Master? Thou knowest he was not telling the truth."

"I' faith, I feel sorry for those who find life so dreary as it is that they have to lie about it."

A few houses farther, Will Scarlet dismounted from his horse and went into one of the neat little cottages that lined the road.

"I have such a thirst, Master, thou wilt have to wait until I drink from you well," he said.

Will went politely to the door of the cottage, thinking to ask first if he might drink from the well. As he passed across the threshold, a tiny thread tickled his nose, much as a cobweb does.

"Faith, what have ye here?" cried Will, spitting and coughing as he tried to get the thread away.

And then from behind the big bed that stood next to the open fireplace he heard the suppressed giggles of two young maidens, and they peered at him shyly, their bright blue eyes as shiny as birds' eyes, their hair, like his own, spun gold. He tried to regard them haughtily, but the more they laughed and hushed each other, the more fiery red his tender skin became. He turned quickly to run back to his horse, though he dreaded meeting the wise eyes of his master with this flush upon his cheeks. And as he turned the little thread again swept across his nose.

"By the good St. Mary, what is it? Little filthy cobweb or hanging bug or hair of my head—" his voice grew so loud in his irritation that soon Little John and Robin Hood came running to see what was the matter. And all that they could see when they came upon him was Will pawing at his red face trying to remove something that wasn't there, and two buxom wenches hiding their titters behind frilly white aprons.

"What is thy name?" said one of the maidens to Will.

He was so startled at this impudent question, flung directly at him in the midst of his embarrassing predicament, he could think of naught to do but to answer it.

"My name is Will," he said stiffly.

At that the two started giggling again.

"'Tis a nice name, anyhow," said one.

"I'm glad it wasn't Simon," said the other.

"Perchance if you will tell me what all this is about," said Robin Hood with his most winning smile, "'twill be worth a shilling to you."

So with much hanging of heads and twisting of frilly aprons, they told the outlaw that it was said that if a maiden wished to know the Christian name of her future husband, she had but to stretch the first thread spun in the morning across the doorway, and that the first man who passed and touched the thread would have the same name as the man she was destined to marry.

"Ah, ha, and Will was the first man," laughed Little John.

Then Will fled back to his horse, and the crimson of his cheeks mounted to his fair head and could almost be seen at the back of his neck.

"Thou didst not get thy drink of water," called Robin Hood merrily.

But Will had kicked his horse with a none too gentle foot and was already galloping off along the highway to Wakefield.

Robin Hood threw the maidens a shilling, and soon he and Little John were following the disappearing horseman. And now at last the three came to Wakefield. Entering the village, they found a goodly number of young and old upon the village green, the young practicing the bow, jumping, wrestling, running races and playing quoits, and the old sitting with their hats lowered over their eyes that they might better see to criticize the ways and manners of the young.

Robin Hood, Will Scarlet, and Little John for a

short time mingled with the group unnoticed.

"Who is that?" Will said to a young boy, pointing to an old fellow with a large Milanese cap on his head, holding a small book.

"He thinketh he is the scholar of this town because he hath traveled in France and can read in that book he carrieth," said the boy scornfully. "He hath never been seen to carry any other book, but since none of us have any we cannot ask him to prove to us whether he is simply saying out of that book he hath what he knoweth by heart, or whether he is truly reading."

Just then the loud voice of a prosperous looking burgher wearing a sealskin belt with a yellow buckle was heard saying, "I'faith, we did it better when I was young, not bending with our bodies to the left but swinging halfway round, so," and with that the fat burgher swung, and swung so vigorously he spun in a circle and fell to the ground with a cry of terror.

"Oh, I see," cried all the young men. "So, it is," and they swung themselves in circles and fell to the

ground with mock cries of terror.

"Who comes here now?" said Will to the boy, pointing to a great man nearly as tall as Little John, with shoulders of even greater breadth.

"Beware of him," said the boy. "That is George o' the Green, the pinder of our town of Wakefield. He locketh up all stray cattle in yon pound house at the edge of the green."

"Why should I beware? "said Will. "I am not a cow."

"Turn away, turn again," cried this tall man who was called George o' the Green. "The three of ye have trod over a path of corn and are sitting on a green that doth not belong to ye. Back to the king's highway."

"Now 'twould be a shame to have to retrace our steps," said Robin Hood, "and of course, we being three and thou only one, 'twould mean three times as many steps and three times as many blows if we argue the matter."

The pinder, without a word, signaled to the onlookers to remain onlookers, and settling his back against a thorn tree and his foot against a stone for support and balance, he plunged at them, as if it were the mere gesture of a hand, a great staff of heavy oak.

And Little John and Will Scarlet and Robin Hood did naught but get in each other's way, for no sooner would one start for the pinder than another would have just started, and they bumped each other until they were skinned and bruised as much from their startings and stoppings as they were from the blows of the pinder.

"I wish we were but one," cried Robin. And even as he spoke, he heard his sword splintered in half and the voice of George o' the Green, cry:

"Now you are but two."

"I wish we were three," cried Will in terror, now that their master could no longer help them. And the pinder broke his sword next.

"Now thou art but one," he cried.

And before he could break Little John's sword, Robin Hood cried, "Hold! Hold thy hand, and my merry man, Little John, shall hold his. Thou art one of the best pinders in the land. How soon canst thou forsake thy pinder's craft and come to the greenwood to live with me?"

George o' the Green smiled broadly and flushed a

little with pleasure at the compliment.

"Sire," he said in such a polite voice after the tone he had been using that all the onlookers and Robin Hood himself could but laugh merrily, "my term ends at Michaelmas next. Then we gather our fees, and I'll take my blade in hand and come to the greenwood with thee."

"And do not forget thy oaken staff," said Will Scarlet.

"Is there anything to eat?" said Little John, groaning in mock starvation.

Then all the villagers brought forth ale and meat, and Robin Hood told such gay tales of life in Sherwood that the pinder said, "I'faith, if I only had collected my fees I would not stay till another sunrise. I would think as much of my master as he thinketh of me, and that is nothing, and miss him not at all when I left."

"But we shall miss thee, George o' the Green," cried one of the boys of Wakefield.

"Thou art the only one who doth not tell us long tales of thine own youth," cried another.

"But he telleth us long tales," said the old man with the book. "If man does not talk to young, he talks to old, and I prefer to talk to the young. They are not so deaf," he said shortly.

"Whose dead?" screamed a wizened-up old fellow.

"There, what did I tell thee?" said the old man with the book.

"Farewell," shouted Robin Hood to all the ancient gossips of Wakefield.

"Farewell," said Little John with his eyes upon George o' the Green, whom he felt would make a splendid friend.

"Farewell," said Will Scarlet to the lad who had told him who all the people of the village were.

"On our way home let us take a different path," said Will Scarlet cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, he doth not wish to meet the maidens who wish to marry him," teased Little John.

Will lapsed into sulky silence, but Robin Hood with a wink at Little John said, "I think it an excellent plan to take a shorter route home, and to race it. Our horses are in good condition, having been rested and fed. Let us fly over the road as if we were the king's messengers, Puck circling the world for Oberon, king of the fairies, water kelpies skimming the waters of the Irish Sea, their foam-tossed hair flying behind them."

"My horse hath a white mane, too," cried Will Scarlet with excitement.

Riding, riding over moor and dale and thicket, down valleys, up hills, through villages where they caught fleeting glimpses of round-eyed housewives and stern townsmen with uplifted hands. And when night fell they saw the woods of Sherwood. They rode into the glade with exalted spirits and tired bodies. They were

met by a group of pale outlaws, Midge at their head, his eyes wet with tears, his voice strained, his cheeks feverish.

"Master, Master, King Richard is in chains. Word cometh that he is a prisoner of Duke Leopold of Austria. And at the same time William de Longchamp, his chancellor, is deposed and the Archbishop of Rouen put in his place. What doth it all mean?"

"It is indeed the end," cried Friar Tuck.

They looked to Robin Hood and wondered what he would say. He turned to them with clear eyes and a look of tenderness.

"All is not at an end. He is Richard still, our king, even though he lie in chains. It may bring him to his senses and hurry him back to the kingdom that is being stolen from him. He will escape. He can but escape, for he hath strong followers as well as strong enemies. The Bishop of Rouen is a gentle soul and will let Earl John rule England, but the Earl can do no real harm until he killeth Richard, and now Richard is beyond his reach."

"What do you suppose has become of Richard's men?" said Will Scarlet, and Robin knew that he mused on the fate of Lord Hugh Fitzwalter, who had followed the King to the Crusades.

"I fear that they lie dead. Brave hearts that they were, they could do little with Richard. He had eagle's wings and could not stay guarded in one place. He had to fly—fly with terrible swiftness and foolhardiness, impulsively, and selfishly. The King of England on the wing, instead of staidly sitting on his throne. Can you not see the glory of it, comrades? He hath a little of

our wildness, our roving spirit in him, and even a golden crown could not weigh him down."

"The King, the King," they cried.

And even as they knelt there in the dusk of early evening and worshipped a king that lay in bonds, Sir Guy of Gisborne was standing idly at the side of Earl John and saying with heavy mockery, "Well, little king, how doth it feel? True, thy head doth not yet wear a crown, but it is in the making for thee. I hear that Philip of France hath written his congratulations to Duke Leopold, offering him more than our ransom to lay hands on the firebrand Richard."

And Earl John did not hear these words with a glad heart, for he knew that Sir Guy of Gisborne cared that he be king only because of the increased power to himself. And the weak brother of Richard, his vain soul unattended with praise and love, longed passionately for a true kingship. And it was at that moment his last loyalty to his mother, his dead father, his brother, died, and he began his plans to force the Archbishop of Rouen and all the barons and judiciaries of England to swear fealty to him, acknowledging him their king.

He looked from the window in the court of the castle and saw a lonely, slim figure pacing its length. It was the Lady Marian, her young body held stiffly, that they who watched might not know of her fear and sorrow. Her proud head high, her eyes staring—staring at wall, at stones, at little gargoyles carved upon the windowsills, at the black sky, the far-off stars.

Richard in chains! Did that mean that her father lay dead in Palestine? Perchance there had been no battle. Or Richard's men had not been taken. Of

course her father was not dead. She told it to herself, carefully, over and over again as if she were learning the long paternosters taught her by Dame Softly, her old nurse. "The stars are bright," she thought. "The air is sweet with flowers and dreams and love. I have no love. Perchance my father—" tossing her head to shake off these sad thoughts, she ran swiftly into the castle, and Earl John heard her voice, gay and sweet:

Let us live, then, and be glad While young life's before us! After youthful pastime had, After old age hard and sad, Earth will slumber o'er us.

Brief is life, and brevity
Briefly shall be ended.

Death comes like a whirlwind strong,
Bears us with his blast along;
None shall be defended.

Live all girls! A health to you, Melting maids and beauteous! Live the wives and women too, Gentle, loving, tender, true, Good, industrious, duteous.

"She is a goodly maiden," thought Earl John, "in love with life, and yet attended by womanly dreams, industrious and dutiful. At least she singeth the song of such, and singeth it with spirit."

And Maid Marian, biting her lips to keep back her sobs, thought at just that moment, "What a horrid song I am singing!" And she shut her eyes to hide the picture of Death, a whirlwind carrying her dear father away, leaving her defenseless and lonely. "As if I

could ever be a neat little housewife and be in-dus-trious," she cried, and putting her bright head down she cried for the days of her childhood again, those breathless, timeless days of happiness.

LADY MARIAN COMES TO SHERWOOD

The noonday sun shone hot from an unclouded sky. No leaf was seen to stir on any bough. The forest birds were still. There was a sultry staleness in the air, and no slightest scent of jasmine or thyme, or violet or woodland moss, told reminiscently of the soft, sweet breezes that were wont to sweep the aisles of Cathedral Lane. Well had Frair Tuck chosen the name for this glade. It was the hand of God which wrought the magic of it. The long, straight nave of nature's church, a score of paces wide and carpeted with yielding turf of greens and golden browns; canopied with high-flung, vaulted roof of foliage; lined by the massive pillars of eternal oaks; bordered by many a still, soft-lighted shrine from whose half darkness bright eyes of startled fawn or doe looked out upon the chance intruder on its privacy.

A twig crackled sharply behind the ivy-clad bole of a fallen oak tree. For a moment thereafter there was no further noise. Then the protecting screen of leaves was parted slightly, as if by some nesting bird that stirred uneasily, about to preen its feathers or to stretch its wings. The face of a young girl slipped into the green framework. And the face was so white and still, the dark eyes looked forth under lowered lids so fixedly, that the whole illusion of peace in the silent lane was undisturbed, and her brooding expression was a part of the whole drowsy spell of enchantment that seemed to be cast over the glade.

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Suddenly there came an untoward interruption. A jackdaw, the lowliest of all the feathered choir, hopped gravely from the shadows of the wood and took up its perch on a hummock of earth in the very center of the stage. It was so black that its plumage gave back a metallic blue reflection to the sunlight as it darted bead-like eyes this way and that in search of flying gnat or creeping louse wherewith to stay its greedy hunger. Perky and mean, an awkward fowl! But his restless little eyes could find no prey. He snapped his sharpened beak, shook himself as if in a fit of anger, drew his claws tightly against his body and shot them down again until he might almost be thought to be stamping his tiny feet in disappointed rage.

He lifted his pert head, and from the open throat issued a series of croaking sounds, for all the world like, "Devilanal!! devilanal!!"

As soon as these protesting notes had been uttered, there flew from beside the ivy-rimmed face by the fallen oak another bird, with a mighty rustling of broken leaves and whir of speeding wings. No mate for the jackdaw, this swift bird! Although he was that species of a hawk given to a lady for sport and called by the pretty title of merling, he carried sudden death in his attack, so skilled was he in the manner of his striking.

Forth from the hiding thickets came the young girl with the great dark eyes, no longer sleepy but stirred with fire at the sight of her pretty bird flying on a dizzy slant, like light itself.

"Coo-ee, haggard! Coo-ee!" she called. Springing to the trunk of a fallen oak, she saw more clearly the merling, saw it careen suddenly and sweep round in a graceful elliptical curve, hover a breathless moment in midair, and then swoop straight downward at the shrinking little jackdaw.

Again her command to return cut the silence shrilly and desperately. But she might as well have stood upon the beach and forbidden to the tide its usual height. As the falcon fell like a plumb-bob from its line, the girl started back, closing her eyes to shut out the sight of the battling birds. And there she stood for a long time, the very image of pity powerless to help.

And then to her small ears that had tried not to listen to the dreadful squawking, came the sound of a booming bass voice, gruff and wheezy as ever a pedal note of the organ at Nottingham. Lifting her drooping head, the girl saw with much astonishment a monk, fat beyond imagining, light of foot as any tripping minstrel, a dancing friar in the midst of Cathedral Lane singing to none other than the impish little jackdaw that she thought of course lay dead. Here it was on the fat, outstretched wrist of the ecclesiastic, ruffling its feathers in vast unconcern as the voice of its master said:

When nobody's dreaming of any such thing, That little jackdaw slays naughty merling.

"Good friar," cried the girl, "where is my pretty merling, my newest pet, and one that I could have sworn would strike the little jackdaw to death?"

But the fat little monk lifted not his head. He inquired fondly of his jackdaw, "Did the gross vulture harm my doxy? What, was my tiny boat-tailed grackle attacked by a bird of prey? Now, may the ban of Holy Church light upon every buzzard in England that weareth bells on its feet to attract such as thee . . ."

LADY MARIAN COMES TO SHERWOOD 355

"Father," cried the maiden imperiously. "A moment, dear priest."

But perchance the monk did not even hear her, for the stream of his words made countless sentences, and they turned themselves into breathless paragraphs.

"Upon every buzzard, I say, may the ban light, all manner of hawks, the vulture of the emperors, the tercels used by kings, gentle falcons of princes, falcons of the rock on the wrists of the dukes, falcons of peregrine held by the earls, the baron's bastard, the knight's sacre, yeoman's goshawk, knave's kestrel, and lady's merling, naughty merling—"

At that moment the priest's eye lit upon the fair and lovely vision of the daughter of Lord Hugh Fitzwalter, recognized by Friar Tuck through the romantic sighings of Will Scarlet and from her encounters with the outlaws on two occasions before. His face lost its ruddy glow and became a mask of dull piety. His tonsured head bent forward. His agitated robe ceased its swirling and hung in straight, dignified lines. Sandaled feet no longer twinkled airily, but shuffled in uncertain gait. But now the maiden looked no longer at him. Leaping from her high perch on the stump with a little cry, she ran to a spot at the edge of the greensward where her merling lay stark in death. She sank to her knees beside the bird, but made no move to lift its lifeless body.

"Art thou much grieved, daughter?" asked the monk with quiet civility.

"Why, no, good father," said the girl, yet not without a gentle sigh of regret for her departed comrade. "It was a fair combat—I'faith, a one-sided one, my merling being thought to be the stronger! The result must not

be questioned. And I do indeed marvel at the brave skill of this poor and lowly crow."

"It did but do its best with the weapons God gave it," murmured the priest. And then, unnoted by Maid Marian, he detached from the jackdaw's feet a weapon that owed no debt to heaven—a pair of wicked-looking steel spurs, sharp as needles and attached to thongs of silver wire. These he thrust into the pocket of his robe, praying the while that Maid Marian would not look too closely at her pet merling and see the bloody hole that led to its brain.

Then the friar lowered himself ponderously to the ground and sat squat, like an infidel Turk, his sandals crossed beneath his robe.

"What seekest thou in the greenwood, daughter?" he asked.

"Peace," said the girl. She looked at him with so sweet and innocent a gaze that the friar began to see why Will Scarlet sang his song of love to her name. "I am called the Lady Marian Fitzwalter, holy sir. I am a ward of the Crown while my father is upon the Crusades, and lent to the care of Sir Guy of Gisborne, under whose tutelage at the castle of Nottingham I must gain instruction in the devoirs to the church."

"Surely, then, that bringeth thee peace," said the friar piously.

"But for two things, good father."

"And what are they?"

"My own rebellious heart, holy sir, which is not overinclined to obedience and deeds of maidenly humility. Oh, I do delight in prayers after they have once been learned, but to spend so many hours in the dark castle saying them over and over, when I might be playing in the forests—"

"But do maidens of Nottingham play in the forests?" said the friar with a twinkle.

"Nay, but I for one have run away to do that very thing," she smiled.

"And what is the other obstacle to perfect peace, Lady Marian?"

At these words the girl sprang lightly to her feet. "Oh, I hate him, the sluggard fool!" she said, with a catch in her quickened breathing. "He follows me about like a dog and looks at me from the corners of his eyes, and his father claps his girlish shoulders approvingly, and scarce an hour ago—and this is what made me finally run away—Geoffrey Gisborne tried to kiss my hand."

"You cried out, and shed salt tears, and . . . "

"Not I, priest," said the girl proudly. "I struck him across the face with my whip. Twice I struck him, so that the mark stayed."

A gleam kindled in the friar's eyes, to be immediately quenched.

"What happened then, my daughter?" he asked quietly.

Quick laughter rippled across Lady Marian's face, and she shook her pretty head ruefully.

"Why, then, if know thou must, my jennet ran away with me. She stumbled and her knees went quickly to the ground, quite as if she had caught sudden sight of thy monkish cowl, dear priest, and had decided to say a little prayer. And there she knelt, the silly jade. Just as if that silly little Geoffrey were not tearing madly to

catch up with me, and crying to his father, Sir Guy of Gisborne, who was following, to come and help him have revenge upon me for the two blows I had struck him!"

"St. Dunstan!" cried the friar. "He had thee

trapped, I warrant."

"Or thought he had! But, even as I was flying over the jennet's head to light on my own—oh, what a fall was that, father!—I bethought me that Robin Hood's glades were not far away. So as down on my pretty bonnet I came with a thud that shook the oaks from their noonday dozing, up flew my feet again as if the ground would have none of me and wished me far away. I ran as fast on my two legs as my pet spaniel ran on his four on the day he stole the boar-hound's dinner. Ah, father, I paused not in the order of my going! I sped me like a willow bolt from a yew-bow."

"And gained the thicket safely?"

"Yea, but my breath was not so easy to gain. I sat me down awhile and gasped for air, and 'twas all that I could do not to shriek with laughter while I peered through a tiny slit in the thick covert of the leaves and saw Sir Guy telling Geoffrey they must not continue the search for me, since we were in Robin Hood's quarters. And I am here—here where I have wished, long since, to be," she cried joyously.

With these brave words Lady Marian Fitzwalter rose from her place beside the fat monk and, thrusting her outspread arms toward the blue arch of the sky, stretched her lithe young limbs luxuriously. She was, the friar noted, graceful as an unguarded cat. Like a boy she was, in her russet riding suit and light boots of limp Cordoban leather, in her simple sleeveless jerkin of brown

drill which was loosely laced at throat and waist, and thus allowed glimpses of the shirt of whitest fine-spun linen that she wore beneath it. The cuffs of her shirt were rolled back from her wrists and forearms, which were warmly browned from exposure to many suns, and this fact, added to the careless arrangement of her gloriously tumbled red-brown hair, made her seem more the child of nature than the young patrician that she really was.

"I know what thou art called," she said suddenly, with mischief in her eye. "It is Tuck, is it not? And thou art the one who held the naughty Mass of Silver Marks for the Bishop of Hereford."

Before he could answer her, the clarion call of a horn broke the stillness, and with a hasty whisper to her to hide in the thickets, the friar left her to run with incredible swiftness off into the forest.

The silence of the woods was absolute. No leaf was stirring; no forest bird gave forth a single note. Lady Marian was quite convinced after a moment's study of her surroundings that she was all alone in this odd hush of nature, but as she looked at the tall, orderly spruce firs, she seemed to see beneath them here and there motionless figures hiding in the shadows. A dwarf-like figure some gnome, perhaps? By yon thick juniper shrub a court-fool clad in motley. There, not far away against a background of rose-tufted larches, three tall yeoman, their Lincoln green blending with the leaves so that only their faces stood forth with startling clarity. Again she heard the clear note of the horn, and at once the figures in ambush stirred to action. Loud halloos, hoarse shouts, were uttered. A score of throats seemed to take up the same shattering cry, protracting its final note into a series of bird warblings and animal-like bleatings and brayings, until one might well fancy himself surrounded by the most varied sort of menagerie. And the majestic volume of sound seemed to Lady Marian the song of Robin Hood, of impish outlaws, of forest beasts and birds that feared not this king of Sherwood. As the echoes of it broke in waves from the pillared trees, there rode down Cathedral Lane the gay figure of a man astride a jennet the very one that not an hour before had unseated young Marian. And on this man's head was her bonnet with the cockerel feather. And on this man's face was a smile of happy mischief that made her wonder what prank he was playing. She did not have to wait long to see, for at a goodly distance behind the rider there walked meekly a tall figure tied to a rope, one end of which was in the rider's hands. The captive thus led in triumph into Sherwood Forest was none other than the wily Guy of Gisborne.

His eyes were blindfolded by a sort of scarf wound tightly about the upper half of his face, but there was no mistaking the tall, ungainly body of the prisoner and his slinking, almost limping gait. His hands were not bound with withes, as Marian had first fancied they would be, since he held them so helplessly before him. Nor was his dagger missing from the girdle that spanned his waist. Nor had his sword been removed from the long scabbard that thumped upon the ground every third step he took. Ah, that was the shame of it! The pompous, boasting fellow was permitting himself to be dragged along like a calf to the butcher's, although both hands were free! A single sweep would loosen the bandage at his eyes,

another would put his sword hilt in position, and he would have had his captor at his mercy. Or, at the very least, he could defend himself long enough to gain the nearby thicket and save himself by flight. And yet, hangdog and fearful, he allowed himself to be towed into harbor like a sinking ship. Maid Marian wondered a little as to the fate of the son of Sir Guy, the weakling Geoffrey, who had dared to touch her hand. Perchance he had escaped. He was a good rider and boasted the fastest charger in Nottingham.

As the young animal danced about beneath him, the rider of the jennet swayed gracefully, seeming in all ways a part of the steed he so carelessly bestrode.

"Poor petted Feather," cried Lady Fitzwalter, "she is not used to so heavy a load!"

And indeed the jennet seemed to be trying her best to rid herself of the burden of this jaunty rider. But verily, she had her trouble, because her rider paid no attention to her sulky curvetings. Nor did he give the slightest heed to the man who followed the rope. It was as if Sir Guy were a housebred spaniel that he knew would come to heel without effort on the part of his master.

Straight to the girl rode the man. He dismounted from Feather and for a moment bent a merry but unblinking gaze at Lady Marian. Then he bowed low before her, removing the bonnet from his head to describe with it a magnificent circle through the air, and again straightened to his full height.

"Your ladyship," he said, most politely, "accept from my poor but devoted hands your jennet and your jeweled cap and your swain's father. Unhappily, the swain himself got away, and he did not seem worth the trouble of

chasing."

The girl's cheeks colored painfully—a deep red. But her gaze did not falter as she regarded this newcomer frowningly. And she carried her boyish grace as carelessly as if she were confronted by some chance beggar or peddler of household wares.

"Some thanks for returning the jennet," she said, and touching the little gray beast she continued, "I have a word to say to this young imp when she bears me home again, and i'faith, I think I shall try to emphasize my meaning with the whip. As for the bonnet, I no longer wish it. Let it fall, I beg of you—But wait! I think perchance the friar would like its sapphire buckle for his poor-box. So do me the favor to convey it to him. As for the excuse of manhood that wears your rope, sirrah, you lie when he is named by you 'my swain's father.' I have nary a swain, and if this man were the father of any son 'twould make me discard the son at once, I swear thee."

It was at this moment that the guardian of Lady Marian heard her voice and the note of contemptuous loathing in it for himself and his son. Whatever else he may have expected, he certainly had not thought to be led where he should be the shamed one in the presence of his ward. In his own vain heart he thought he had impressed the Lady Fitzwalter by his high-handed manners, his authority in Nottingham, and it was not until she openly struck Geoffrey that he foresaw any real difficulty in marrying her to his nerveless son.

Maid Marian leaped forward impetuously and tore the bandage from his eyes

Sir Guy of Gisborne's face looked like an unhealthy moon. An ashen color spotted his yellow skin, and his upper lip trembled visibly beneath its thin mustaches. He looked dispirited and like a tall wraith, willowy and ghostlike, as he swayed to meet the bright light so suddenly thrust upon him.

Almost at once the greenwood became alive with the phantom figures Lady Marian had seen in ambush. The fool in motley stepped lazily into the sunlight and rattled his bells: "Ho-hum!" he drawled. "Ho-hum. The town-crier says Mamma Stumptail hath lost her Bunny."

"I found it, I found it," shrilled a fat little dwarflike man. And dancing nearer to the pale figure of Sir Guy, said, "Melancholy little hare, burrowing in a brake, smelling of musk, crying squeak!"

"Catch him and cook him and have a rabbit pie," suggested an archer, fitting an arrow to his bowstring as if to shoot game for his dinner.

This teasing of the unworthy Guy, although richly deserved she knew, seemed unfair to Lady Marian. It was rather dreadful, she thought, to hold him up to public ridicule. Her hot anger against her guardian began to cool somewhat. She looked about her and saw no one familiar—no jolly friar, no Will Scarlet, and, above all, no king of the forest commanding them all, no Robin Hood. She felt suddenly alone and a little frightened. Her tender heart forgot the rancor it had held against this friend of her father's who was not a friend, and she went to Sir Guy:

"Be of good courage, sir, and do not fume at their rough quips. Such hedge-born rustics do not presume

to know the uses of gentility. Their words show forth the crude nature of their minds. One needs but to be sorry for them."

And then the girl turned quickly to confront him who had ridden her jennet. If she were discomfited to find this man's eyes fixed upon her with a gaze both whimsical and ardent, there was nothing in her manner to let him know that fact. She seemed to all who saw her at this moment a thing apart from her surroundings, and the simple reproof she carried in her voice was a deeper hurt because of the coldness of her tones and the slight catch in her words.

"As for thee, sirrah," she continued, her winged mouth trembling as she viewed the fellow beside the jennet, "is it thy custom to stand aside and let others say things that perchance thou wouldst not?" Instinctively she felt that this man who had so indolently led Sir Guy into the midst of the outlaws would not stoop to ridiculing him.

A slight flush crept into the face that looked down upon hers. For a moment the man seemed ill at ease and half thrust forward his hand to disclaim her statement. But then he apparently thought better of the action, for he shrugged his shoulders ever so little, and a straightforward look came upon him, not into his eyes alone, but into his whole demeanor. He smiled ruefully at her.

"Why, thou art right in what thou sayest, damsel! And that, if you please, is the end of it. I had thought to put shame into Sir Guy of Gisborne, that thy return to his household might be more peaceful for thee. But the savor of the jest is gone. Its taste is flat to both of us. May I be forgiven, Lady Marian?"

"Hold there, not quite so fast," spoke the hoarse voice of Sir Guy. From the corner of his eye he had seen how the lurking figures of the yeomen at the edge of the lane had melted away into the shadows, and he was conscious that he was alone with this single unarmed forest outlaw and Maid Marian, his ward, who a moment before had stood on his side. Now, if ever, did the time seem ripe for some assertion of his authority, tardy though it might be. "I have a word or two to say, fellow," he continued, with a quick glance backward to assure himself they were still alone. "See to how thou dealest with this lady and me from this moment forth. It were wise for thee to send us out of Sherwood safely and at once, for there are those who will seek us. And when they find us, it will go hard with such as have mishandled us. There are dungeons in Nottingham Castle for thy kind!"

At once a motley fool stepped forward suddenly from the thicket, crying, "Have a care, my lord, or I'll put on my flashing red nose and my flaming face and come wrapped up in a calf's skin and cry boo to thee!"

That was more than Sir Guy could stand. To be booed at like a silly gosling while his young ward stood by to witness! I'faith, she was laughing and would tell all Nottingham about him if he did not show some spirit. So he had his sword out in a twinkling, and he struck a firm attitude, feet wide apart, that he might be ready to sustain undaunted any attack, however violent, that the fool might think it wise to deliver. And he opened his wide mouth and cried aloud his battle shout:

"A Gisborne, a Gisborne!"

But neither of his opponents lifted a sword. And at this moment, in full cry, there broke from a neighboring thicket a pack of ill assorted beings: first came Friar Tuck, wallowing from side to side like a sinking galleon in the trough of a wind-whipped sea, fain to drop from exhaustion; behind him the figure of a veritable giant; and then at their heels a welter of dogs, and men in Lincoln green.

"We hear—we have missed something," Friar Tuck gasped. And just then the whole pack of them, unable to stop running, swept straight into Sir Guy of Gisborne, who stood stupidly right in their path. Gone was his breath, fled from him all further desire to fight, his spirit snuffed like the small flame of a tallow dip. He dropped willingly to the ground and shut his eyes, mercifully hiding the forms of outlaws he feared more than anything else in the world.

"Oh, he is dead," cried Maid Marian turning pale and hiding her dark eyes. Again she felt the curious sense of aloneness. Sir Guy meant naught to her, but he had furnished her home and security in her father's absence. If he were dead, where would she go?

But it soon developed that he was by no means slain. In fact, as far as his present injury was concerned, he might look forward to many long years of peaceful living. A few moments after his downfall he was already sufficiently recovered to swallow a great stoup of ale brought to him by the orders of the forest prowler. And something of his old-time swagger and insolence returned to him when he saw the anxious eyes of his ward upon him.

"I shall come back, fellow," he threatened the calmeyed man on the jennet, "to win thee with my good sword. And my promise of a dungeon in Nottingham Castle shall be made good."

"I care not to talk about it with thee," said the spirited man of the forest coldly. "Perchance thou dost not think there is many a cave in Sherwood that would make as good a dungeon as any in Castle Rock? I care not to throw thee into one of them. Rather, go thou from me back to thy home. Until I am ready to have further words with thee concerning matters of importance to thee, thy ward, and to her father, Lord Fitzwalter. every step that thou takest will be witnessed by watchful eyes following thee through the thickets of this wood where thy very shadow leaves thee. More sly and more patient in woodcraft than the fox, the unseen shapes of thy watchers will never be far away. Thou art free. Go! But though thou hast thy liberty, use it not in plans for the capture of those thou hast met here this day. Thou art marked down, and thy least gesture will be known. Walk in fear. We are not ready for thee now. Thine hour hath not struck."

Sir Guy of Gisborne, with a look of horror on his lemon-colored face, went slinking off, his spare frame seeming to shiver, though the day was sultry and still. And even Lady Marian shuddered at the thought of the slow but sure doom that tracked her guardian. And, try as she would, she was not able to fathom the purpose of such postponement of his punishment. It did not seem natural that a hardy forester such as this man was who faced her could forego the chance of revenge on the man who had made war upon all the outlaws of Sherwood.

"Who gave the command to spare Gisborne?" she asked.

[&]quot;I did," he said simply.

"And who art thou to control the actions of a hundred men?" she demanded curiously. But hardly had she asked the question when she knew! The scales fell from her eyes. How could she ever have been so stupid as not to recognize in the proud face so near her own the features made famous throughout Merrie England in endless tales and songs? Why, this was Robin Hood! "Oh—" and Lady Marian could say no more.

LADY FITZWALTER PLAYS WITH THE OUTLAWS

The hero of her girlhood's dreams and the picturesque figure of a childhood memory! Companion to the starveling beggar, yet received by Queen Eleanor herself. Beloved of the oppressed. Hated by the arrogant, the champion of right and the scourge of falseness and of cruelty. Small wonder that Gisborne had trembled before this man! Lady Marian laughed aloud in her delight, and there was infection in her merriment, for the forest prowler joined in right happily.

"Oh, but it seems passing stupid of me not to have recognized thee at first blush," she cried, after a little. "And yet, somehow, I had never quite thought of thee as mortal man like Will Scarlet and the rest. For, thou knowest, I have considered the matter these many years. I'faith, I have been raised on thee, as I have been on porridge and biscuits and whey."

"I think I do not understand thee," said the outlaw

gently.

"I mean that thou hast been a part of my education," explained Maid Marian seriously. "Since I was the smallest mite, as far back as I can remember, I have been told about things by my tutors and by my nurse, Dame Softly. This thing was good for me to eat, that thing was not right for me to do; I must not cross my feet in sitting; I must not speak till I was spoken to; I must go to mass; I must go to bed long hours before

mine eyelids told me to, and arise before mine eyes had wakened-and other such things as that. And when I had been a very proper maid, done all my devoirs and studied my grammar and my lute, why, then my tutors would tell me pretty romances, like Sir Amadis of Gaules and Aucassin and Nicolette. And I, remembering the time thou didst visit the castle and frighten the nobles at a banquet, would beg for tales of thee and the impish doings of thy merry men. And much as I loved these tales and songs of thee, I somehow never felt that the people in them were real men and women such as those I saw about me. Thou hadst, sir, much of the fairy about thee—Will o' the Wisp—else how was it thou couldst disappear like thin blue smoke whenever thou wert sought? Goodfellow Elf-king—a sprite that led men into marvelous adventures—a creature of a hundred changeful shapes."

"And yet thou once didst ride upon my shoulder and hear my voice, human enough, and certainly thou must have heard of my wanton robberies, such as only a living

man may commit."

"Oh, how explain to thee, good sir, the workings of a maiden's fancy! I knew, and yet I did not know, that thou wert alive and human, of such a size, so many years, of such a bearing. You see, I did not want thee to be a man like those that I have known—a mincing and scented Geoffrey, puffy like the sheriff of Nottingham, slinking like Sir Guy, or even just gay and handsome and charming like dear Roger de Lacy, whom I can never love for that very eternal careless joy. And so I made up a Robin for myself and decked him forth with the virtues that my childhood loved."

LADY FITZWALTER WITH THE OUTLAWS 371

"And with what gifts did you endow me, maiden?" And the outlaw's face looked old and tired as he listened to her childish answer.

"Smile at me, Sir Robin of Greenwoods, and thou shalt never hear the end of my story."

As if he could smile at her sweetness! But he thrust this more serious emotion from his heart, and played the game gallantly with her, romantic and half mocking.

"I swear to thee by every saint this matter is to me of

gravest import."

"Why, then, I chose for thee to be the bravest man in England, a more radiant heart than Galahad, and with it all the ruggedness of Lion-Heart himself. Thou wert a savior always to the meek and lowly, and curiously gallant toward all women, ever a little sad about them, which makes a maiden wonder if thou didst ever love unhappily—"

"They tell me that all love is unhappy," he laughed. "And there, maiden, thou art quite wrong. I have never loved a lady, save one," and devoutly crossing himself,

she heard him whisper, "Mary."

For a moment she was startled. This was a Robin Hood she had never dreamed of. Men who loved the Virgin above any living thing lived in monasteries, or were like her father, lost in strange dreams and scarcely aware of those about them. This forest outlaw laughed at such monks as he met, and lived the strong and noble life of true manhood. What could it mean?

"Then why dost thou live in Sherwood Forest?" she asked.

"Why else, for sooth? Why, because underneath the canopy of God's blue vault there is no spot half so lovely

as out-of-doors! 'Tis there alone a man may breathe freely and be himself, like any hermit or anchorite, with his rapt gaze fastened upon the true cross. The good Virgin does not ask us to prison ourselves in dank old monasteries. Light and laughter she asks, so I worship where the voice of God speaks to the soul in the songs of vivid birds and the high winds of night, and I serve none but him.' The outlaw answered in a stirring voice.

"Not even Earl John, who is supposed to be the real king of England, though Richard still keeps the title far away in Austria?" the girl questioned, with a mischievous

light in her dark eyes.

"Earl John least of all," asserted Robin hotly. "He is a puppet that I could bend to my careless bidding."

"O ho! a vaunting fellow is Robin Hood. Have a care, sir. Pride goeth before a fall, my good nurse,

Dame Softly, often said to me."

"I am no boaster," answered the forest outlaw simply. "That rôle I leave to John, with his rattling thunderclaps of speech and braggings that he would make a better king than Richard. Since he hath chased me all over England, he promises to come to Nottingham soon again and catch me on the point of a pikestaff and brand me a felon. But I have written him my answer."

"Tell me what it is, I prithee!" begged Lady Marian.
"Why, i'faith, I quoted him the lines his great brother
Richard sent to the Saracen before the walls of Acre:

Who knows himself a braggart, Let him fear this: for it will come to pass, That every braggart shall be found an ass.

The girl gave a quick gasp of dismay as she heard Robin Hood recite these verses, for though she had dared to treat the name of the king lightly in the presence of damsels of Nottingham who would never repeat what she had said, this open defiance of Earl John seemed to her very dangerous. Her dark gray eyes were round with fear and astonishment when she heard the capricious and saucy answer that the forest outlaw had sent to the powerful regent.

"Why, I am afraid thou hast done a very foolish thing!" she exclaimed. "Dost thou not tremble at the thought of swift and unexpected vengeance? Now that William de Longchamp is really in the Tower of London, held prisoner, John Plantagenet can do many things he could not do before. He will send an army to uproot thee and thy merry followers from Sherwood."

"It may be as thou sayest," the man agreed carelessly, "in which case good King Richard's brother will find us too deep-rooted in the soil of England for ready pulling."

He bent over and placed the thumb and finger of his right hand at the base of the mighty oak by which he was standing. He made feint to tug at the tree trunk with all his strength. After a moment spent in such vain effort, he looked upward at the maiden with a glance of whimsical surprise.

"I find 'twill not come out of the ground," he said.

"Oh, thou thinkest thyself as hardy as this great oak," she answered with something of her old imperious manner.

"Why not?" her companion replied, a new note of cold metallic sternness in his voice and a frown on his forehead. "I tell thee, girl, that an old world is passing, though kings are still unconscious of the fact and the

Saxon slaves still bend and cringe at their Norman master's word. 'Tis as much, methinks, to be a man as to be a tree. Both should stand straight upright with head in the air, each trusting in his own good strength. Many a woodsman has already tried to bring me to a fall, and you notice my crest is unlowered. Let him beware who would strike me low!"

"Oh, I have seen thee before—thou art none other—but how couldst thou be?" floundered Lady Marian with her lips scarlet with excitement and her eyes very bright.

"Who am I? I prithee, remember him not. Thou didst not like him well, if I remember."

"What a master at disguise thou art. First the young esquire visiting my friend Roger de Lacy, calling thyself Brian de Furneaux and pretending ignorance of Robin Hood. Next, as the knight that spoiled my adventure with Will Scarlet. I see now 'twas a game betwixt the two of you. And dost thou remember when Roger de Lacy touched thy charger with his whip, and thou didst speak to him commandingly? It was that tone in your voice I remembered."

"Well, maiden, now thou knowest me for what I am. All thy sweet dreams are gone, and in their place a strange reality. For I can see vague disappointment in thy clear eyes, a little of surprise and wonder in thy curving, thoughtful mouth. Go thou from Sherwood remembering only thy dreams. Dreams are nicer far than things that dreams are made on."

"But I do not wish to go away," she said poutingly. "Dost thou not understand? I have run away for good. Send for my good nurse, Dame Softly. She will take care of me here as well as in the dark castle of Nottingham.

I await my father's return. I know he will come back to He could not have gone and left me all alone if he knew I was not safe and happy. And I am not safe or happy, either one, so his heart will tell him he must come back to his wild young daughter."

"Yea, there is no need for thee to live longer in Nottingham Castle, maiden. But it may be long years still before thy father's return. Listen to this plan, and think not I give it with a parent's commanding voiceit is but to think upon. Stay thou here with us in the greenwood for a fortnight's time. I will bring to the cottage in the Vale of Peace, Laurel, the wife of Allin-a-Dale, and together you can play at housekeeping. For fourteen days thou canst run wild in the thickets, mellowed by the sun, cooled by the wind. Thy proud heart can be young again, and thou shalt simply sing, and laugh. and tease, and grow tired from head to foot, as the very young do."

"I remember," she laughed a little wistfully. And Robin Hood knew that she remembered that half-dryad child of Dallom Lea, who had grown up without her dead mother's companionship, without the care of a father, for the thin gray-faced ascetic that walked in his dreams of unreal religion had paid little attention to his child. Lord Hugh had realized his little daughter's wondrous sweetness only on that last night of his departure to the Crusades.

"Thou shalt learn to know better that indolent, romantic Will Scarlet who is as beautiful as any bird of the forest, and who hides relentless determination and courage beneath his gay and bantering exterior. He is not, as thou mayst think, a partner of the careless De Lacy. De Lacy hides naught beneath his humor but a heart of love for thee, Maid Marian."

"And that is why I cannot return his love," she cried sorrowfully. "He answers not my lonely thoughts. He doth not even listen to my dreams, but says, 'Thou art beautiful,' and such things as any noble woos a lady with."

"And thou shalt know better the youngest of our band, Midge, who trieth to do things exactly right and who generally doth them quite wrong. And Peter Clifton, newly come to us from Whitby, a city of melancholy beside the relentless and sorrow-driven sea."

"Then I may stay with thee," she said happily, "and know better all these comrades of whom thou

hast told me."

"Only a half-moon canst thou stay, Lady Fitzwalter, for our tasks are rough, and long journeys interrupt our dwellings here—racing over hill and dale without sleep or other bodily comfort. Thy frail self couldst not stand it. Thou wouldst indeed lose all the love for Robin Hood and his merry men that thou hast ever had. So in a fortnight's time the outlaws of Sherwood will busy themselves preparing for their queen a chariot. And in it we shall bank flowers where thou shalt lie and feel a little like a child of the forest. We shall take thee to London to another queen, and there, damsel, I prithee stay until Richard returns with news of thy father."

"Queen Eleanor, thou meanest?" she said with puzzled brows.

"Queen Eleanor," he answered. "She is old—more than half a century old, and thou art young. She clings to the last shreds of her ravaged beauty, and thou treatest thy beauty carelessly. Her heart, though, is still young,

and she will play with thee more than thou canst imagine. Thy lonely thoughts are her lonely thoughts, too. She longeth for someone, and thou longest for someone. Couldst thou not go to her for a little while, a year perhaps? Travel with her to Poitou, wear shimmering silks and velvets in London town, and break men's hearts even as thou hast done at Nottingham?"

For a short moment it looked as if the proud Lady Fitzwalter would lose her temper at being dictated to by a stranger. Then, in swift contradiction, her mouth drooped sorrowfully, as a child cherishing a disappointment.

"Thou dost not want me here in Sherwood—always?" she murmured scarce above a whisper.

Robin Hood turned very pale. The frail little murmur stirred his heart. The child's eyes —for she seemed none other than a child—regarded him with wistful candor. It was more than he could bear to disappoint her. He told her the truth, little guessing that it hurt her.

"There is no place for such as thee, child. It is a green glade of sunshine today, but tomorrow the trees may bend in the fierce wind, the lightning may strike. It is the Vale of Peace, but it may turn at any time into the shattered remains of terrible battle. It is the world of the soil and the open sky—man's world to be fought and chained and then made beautiful for such as thee. And we who are outlaws cannot bear to fight it and turn it into a man-made haven, for only now can it be called a Saxon England. No Normans rule it. No Frenchman gives his orders. We are all Saxons, saving a little of soil and trees and wild-blown flowers from turning into

Normandy. There is room for only one woman here, to cheer us in our despair, to smile at us, to bless our hearts."

As if in a dream, Maid Marian heard the voice of Robin Hood, reverent and deep:

The Father seeing Our ruin, cruel, Brought into being Out of the thorn tree, Out of the rose tree, A Rose Eternal!

"I will be pleased then to stay with thee a fortnight's length." she said quietly. And he saw not her bewilderment, so wrapped in thought was he, so deep in worship of his sacred Lady. "And then I shall go, as thou hast asked me, to Queen Eleanor until my father's return." She longed to say more, to rouse him from his reverie. But she had lived a lifetime with her father, the sweet Lord Hugh, who had never grown to know his little daughter because of his intense love of religion, the good Lord Hugh who was not like mortal man at all—a dream figure, leaving those who loved him in loneliness. That the gay and dauntless Robin Hood could have this strange streak in his otherwise manly nature was almost unbelievable. She pushed the thought from her mind and determined to watch him closely for a fortnight. If she saw no signs of it again, she would know it was all part of the mystery and happiness of her meeting with a hero of England, an occasion that could not be ordinary.

Just at this moment there sounded on the still air the faint call of a distant horn. There was nothing in the three long blasts of the wood-horn far away to attract the attention of the ordinary wayfarer, for they would only seem to indicate the presence within the forest of some hunting party that was being bidden to a common place of meeting. But there was that in the tone of the shrill summons that caught and held the ear of Robin. His head thrust forward into a position of most intent listening and his lithe figure as if suddenly turned to stone, he waited for something. A crow screamed, an owl hooted, a blackbird piped. Were these notes from birds startled from their silence, or the imitative calls of Robin's men passing a message swiftly across the quiet spaces of Sherwood? Marian's ear, trained though it was to woodland notes, was not sharp enough to distinguish, but her companion seemed in not a moment's doubt.

"My Lord Bishop of Hereford, Giles Iron-Hand, is riding toward us, as yet some half a league removed. With him come two score men in full panoply, rascals paid for by St. Peter's pence and promises that the holy church will forgive the various indulgences of wealthy nobles. Stay behind or fare with me as thou wilt, but I am off to join my waiting comrades."

Robin turned and ran past the embowered cottage to the trail that led up the face of the cliff behind them. With never an instant's delay Marian fell into step at his heels. From the corner of her eye she saw Friar Tuck burst forth from the little house by the lake, close followed by graceful Will Scarlet, who waved to her gayly. At intervals as they toiled quickly upward they were joined by one figure and another, without noise or confusion, summoned by the strange bird calls even as Robin Hood was. A single purpose dominated one and all, to cover ground rapidly and in silence.

Will Scarlet's hand grasped Marian's wrist as she caught the toe of a russet boot against the edge of a projecting rock, and drew her smoothly on. She glanced shyly up at his fair, handsome countenance. But he, like the others, was intent upon the hard climb. She gave a trembling little sigh, and her comrade turned to her with a swift, winning smile. She smiled back at him and put all her energy upon keeping up with the others. His smile had welcomed her, had taken away some of the ache left by Robin Hood's words. They did not need her here, but she would not get in their way. Breathless and aching in every muscle, she hurried on, thankful for the constant tugging at her wrist.

A long time they traveled, but always by hidden paths, winding this way and that along unseen trails on which the girl would have lost herself once and forever. Now and then she could not forbear a shudder at the remembrance of how many men had given up their lives in the untrodden depths of Sherwood, often those who, though themselves practiced woodsmen, had but wandered a short distance to one side of the blazed trail when overcome by their lust for hunting wild game.

But no such fate beset the band of Robin Hood. Never pausing for breath, with not a moment's halt of indecision as to the direction of their course, they traveled swiftly in single file toward some invisible goal. At intervals Marian caught sight of a flashing form or two ahead of her, silent and ghostlike. She realized that they were the guides leading the way to their destination. And then, without previous warning, just as the tiring girl was beginning to think that they would never reach the journey's end, she was brought to a sudden stop by

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Will Scarlet, and with a gesture bidden to crouch down upon her knees and creep silently forward. This she did right willingly, for her legs ached with walking. She had not crawled far in this fashion when she came to the edge of a tangle of briars through which she could peer without peril of discovery. She turned to see how her comrade was faring, but to her amazement he was gone. Peering once more through the tangle of briars, she looked down upon a strange scene.

THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD AGAIN MEETS THE OUTLAWS

The highway lay below the cliff, placid and winding as a river. At this juncture it was not banked on both sides by heavy forest; on the left rose the jutting rock covered with prickly briars, and on the right lay a full hundred feet of greensward that might have been manmade, so perfectly it shaped itself into a half-moon, and so empty it was of a single tree. Back of the half-moon green rose the forest, blacker than usual in contrast to the open land before it.

Along the highway Maid Marian could see the Bishop of Hereford and his men riding their fat, well-fed palfreys, their long black robes trailing like ugly shadows behind them. The sun shone on their bare, shaven heads, for many had removed their cowls, and they laughed loudly at times, and sang in open mockery:

I am the Abbot of Cockaigne,

and this was a gay song indeed, quite unsuited to true followers of the risen Christ.

In the little crescent green a group of shepherds were bending over a fire, and Maid Marian saw their faces clearly. This tiny fat man was Friar Tuck and the slim fair-haired youth, Will Scarlet—i'faith, he looked passing handsome in the strong light. Four others there were whom she knew not in their strange disguise, but the last—she bent forward so that she nearly fell from the cliff. Yes, it was Robin Hood himself. A

little older than the others, his manner betokened, for while they were over-acting their little play and talking of sheep and shepherdly affairs in a loud and stagy manner, he was surveying the approaching ecclesiastics with a charming and whimsical stare, much as the real shepherd, had he been there, would undoubtedly have done. He knew how to do things, the maiden decided with a little sigh. He was not helpless as a child, like the dear foolish Roger de Lacy. He was not even a little vain like Will Scarlet. Each of these she could comfort and cheer, but a Robin Hood—king of the forest indeed, a man's man, and one who looked upon such as she as a father looks upon his amusing child. And his beautiful love for Lady Mary, queen of Heaven! Where did that fit into the marvel of his being?

But she forgot these thoughts as she leaned forward to watch the little drama before her. It was indeed like a play in which each had memorized his lines, for the voices of churchman and shepherd alike rang forth in the forest silence with almost theatrical bearing.

"What is the matter here?" cried out the bishop himself in a high, lordly fashion. "For whom do you make this ado? Can it be," and he cocked his little head in the attitude of a small wren peering at a grubworm, "nay, it can't be—yea, but it can! Verily, I believe thou art killing the king's venison."

"We are shepherds," answered Robin Hood in a meek and lowly voice. "We keep sheep all the year, alone on the hillsides in storm, in heat, in darkness and light. We are disposed to be merry this day for all the days we miss such merriment. So we are indeed killing the king's fat venison."

"You are brave fellows," said the Bishop of Hereford in a sneering sing-song. "Brave fellows indeed. The King shall know of your doings. Make haste and come along with me. I shall take thee to the King myself."

"Oh, pardon, pardon," cried Robin Hood, kneeling before the bishop, apparently in deep humility. "Pardon I pray. Thou wearest the cloak of a high ecclesiastic. It becomes thee not to order us to our doom. Thou shouldst read us a prayer and go on thy way."

"And who art thou to talk to me in such a manner?" said the bishop imperiously. "No pardon I owe thee. Therefore make haste, I tell thee." He added petulantly, "I like not to linger in woods such as these. We shall go at once to the King."

Instantly Robin Hood changed his whole manner. From the humble shepherd he sprang gracefully back into his rôle as commander. Leaning against a great yew tree, he lifted his horn and blew three loud blasts. From the dark woods behind the crescent of greensward came a hundred figures, not all in Lincoln green—some in scarlet, the motley dress of the fool, the royal blue of lords and earls, even the purple of the king.

It was a wondrous sight for Lady Fitzwalter to see the hundred men fall to their knees before their master, their eager faces upturned toward his laughing, tender mouth, all crying, "What is the matter, Master, that thou blowest so hastily?"

"Oh, here is the Bishop of Hereford, who will not pardon us, as befits one of his calling, for killing a few of the king's many deer that we may not starve."

"Off with his head," cried Little John, imitating the very manner of the sheriff of Nottingham and dancing

about like an angry bear. "Cut off his head, I say thee, and throw him into an open grave."

"Oh, pardon, pardon," cried the bishop, quite unaware that he was using the very words of Robin Hood. "If I'd known it was you, I'd have gone some other way."

"No pardon I owe thee," answered Robin Hood, quite aware that he was using the very words of the bishop. "Come along with me to the court in Sherwood rather than to the court in London town. We have not a king to judge thee, but I myself will entertain thee right royally."

Maid Marian saw the bishop turn ashy gray as Robin Hood took him by the hand and led him straight toward the blackest part of the forest. And each of the bishop's men was led in this same manner, an outlaw on each side. She felt a soft touch on her shoulder and, turning quickly, saw the winsome face of Will Scarlet.

"I have come to get thee, Lady Fitzwalter. We need not hurry back to the Vale of Peace, for Robin Hood intends to lead the bishop a long and weary trail."

"What does he mean, 'entertain him'?" cried Maid Marian. "He does not surely intend to be kind to one who would have thrown him willingly into prison a moment before had not his men come to the rescue?"

"It is not Robin Hood's way to return the sort of punishment he gets. He will give the bishop a great dinner, roast venison and other delicacies that were put on the fire by Nicholas, our cook, as soon as the bird-call messages came to tell us that the Bishop of Hereford and all his retinue were approaching."

"It is marvelous," said Maid Marian, her dark eyes sparkling. "If I had a ribbon in my hair today," she

continued teasingly, "it is Robin Hood who would get it, for he is the hero of this occasion."

Will flushed, but looked at her in boyish frankness. "Of course, maiden, Robin Hood is the greatest hero of his day. We have but learned from him."

"But I find him very hard to learn," she persisted.

"Perhaps he is," smiled Will Scarlet. "But one man has never yet been able to discuss another, damsel, so let us forget him. I could tell thee that Lady Nancy Mortimer is pleasant to look upon, and dances the pavone very well indeed, but hath little charm to my way of thinking."

"But that helps me not in my unsettled opinions of one Robin Hood," she cried ruefully.

"Well, let us play awhile, and dismiss my rival," smiled Will Scarlet.

She tossed her head, much in the same manner she used with the presuming Roger de Lacy, but found he paid not the slightest attention to her and was not at all the penitent of heart that young men of Nottingham were wont to be when she looked at them with flashing eyes. This was indeed a place where Lady Fitzwalter was treated casually. So she gladly took his outstretched hand, and together they ran down the side of the cliff they had so painfully climbed, crying aloud with breathless merriment and the quick thrill of their perilous journey.

"We should be hunting for something on such a chase as this," she said.

"We can be like the knight chasing the phantom stag that always flees ahead of him, so that he is beseiged by madness in the elusive chase."

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"What an idea, Will Scarlet!" Maid Marian shivered. "Imagine galloping and galloping after a shadow, and never reaching it and never losing it, until thy mind sees only shadows never to be reached, never to be lost. 'Tis a worse fate than the rack."

"Or chasing an idea," Will Scarlet murmured.

"Of what wert thou thinking, friend?"

"Only of Robin Hood and his wish for an England that is a blended Saxony and Normandy. An elusive shadow that, my lady, thou wilt agree."

"Nay, I think that the day may come," she answered. "Tis true I am but a maiden and know little of the whirl and buzz of the court of England, little of those masculine mysteries called 'national affairs' that such as thou discuss at night around camp fires or fireplaces all over the world. But look thou at thyself, for instance. Thou art a Saxon, and thy father is well received by every Norman noble save the few like Sir Guy who persist in the old fight for the sake of gain and profit."

"Enough, then, of masculine mysteries, fair lady.

Let us talk of thee."

"I have been in Sherwood for a whole long day, and no one yet has asked that favor," she smiled.

"And is that so very long a time to go unflattered?"

"A great relief, I assure thee, sir, but a very long time indeed. At home, in Nottingham, there is attendance upon me every moment—whistles outside my window, small missives telling me my eyes were like stars last night—and forever my faithful De Lacy indolently lying upon some bench in the castle courtyard, calling me and singing to me."

"And thou likest it?"

"Nay, I think I like it not. But at least it maketh a lady feel that there are those willing to break her loneliness, even though she knoweth full well they would truly only make it the more painful."

"I do not understand," cried Will with sympathy in

his eyes.

"Art thou, then, to prove to be but another? Another pair of eyes seeing my hair, my lips, my slimness, and seeing not my thoughts, sea-foam and prancing horses and candletips; hearing my laughter and sobs, yet hearing not the voices murmuring in mine ears, calling me away and away."

For answer, Will Scarlet hung his head. Could he ever see with her the fanciful loveliness of life and listen to its weird and rushing music? Should he fly from her now, that he be not too sorely hurt? Robin Hood could understand her loneliness, for the strange utterance she had just made to him seemed just what Robin Hood might have said on a cold still night when they sat about the fire talking aimlessly together. And yet was not Robin Hood's heart more deeply lonely than her own, so that her little sadness would look insignificant to him? Will Scarlet determined to keep her in his heart until he saw surely that another had been given her full understanding.

"Come and play," he cried.

They ran the lengths of trail, arched above with strong branches. She made feint to climb the slippery trunks.

"'Tis like running in a dream and never getting anywhere," she laughed, "this putting one foot here, another here, and finding I am on the ground again."

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And he tried to show her, by climbing agilely the tallest beech of all, that did not start to branch until full thirty feet above the earth.

"I'faith, it is marvelous," she cried, and then found that he had disappeared entirely. Running from tree to tree, she found him many yards away where he had reached the topmost limb of a slim spruce, and sat there, swaying perilously.

"Thou squirrel!" she laughed, and screamed in terror as he played at falling.

Soon he was beside her once again, and they hurried on through the forest, anxious lest they miss the finish of the little play between the Bishop of Hereford and the outlaw Robin Hood.

They came upon the whole band of outlaws near the little arbor in the Vale of Peace. Forth from the embowered cottage came Nicholas, the enterprising little cook, whose cheeks were as red as rare meat. Behind him came a slim and lovely damsel with hair of palest gold scalloped against the whiteness of her cheek. She stood at the door of the cottage and laughed heartily at the sight of Nicholas swaggering proudly toward the bishop, holding aloft the product of his cookery.

"Who is she?" whispered Lady Fitzwalter.

"Laurel, the wife of Allin-a-Dale, of whom thou must have heard. He singeth more sweetly than any minstrel in England, and the Bishop of Hereford tried to marry Laurel to an old usurer instead of him. Had not Robin Hood intervened, she would have a sad face this day, instead of her pretty laughter. She hath come to stay in the embowered cottage to keep thee company on thy visit." The bishop ate with a doleful expression on his priestly countenance, fully expecting to be ordered to death at any moment.

Friar Tuck came dancing over to him, to sit near.

"Worthy bishop, I touch the hem of thy garment right reverently," he said, giving the bishop a hearty pull by the skirt.

"Oh!" moaned the bishop, jumping with fright.

"How goeth the dinner?" asked Will Stutely politely, even a little in awe of this famous personage.

"It tasteth right well, but perchance poison lurketh in the meats, and anyhow I know its price will be high

before this day is done."

"The price of meat in Sherwood Forest," said Robin Hood, "is always only that a man can pay." And going to the bishop's cloak he drew forth a fat purse and counted out three hundred pounds. "I see that thou canst pay this very easily, for thou carryest it carelessly about with thee," he said.

The bishop licked his thin lips feverishly, but said never a word.

"Isn't it nice to be rich!" sighed Friar Tuck, with a mischievous look at the bishop.

"Now, then, I shall go," the little man said defiantly.

"Oh, must thou be going?" asked Will Scarlet in surprise.

"Nay, nay, stay a little longer," soothed Robin as if urging a homesick child.

"Nay, I must be going," cried the bishop.

"Very well, then, as soon as thou hast danced us a jig. Friar Tuck, show him our favorite. We call it the Bishop Walk." With that Friar Tuck lifted his skirts

coyly above his bare fat knees and did his tripping dance, with three little runs and a terrible leap into the air, at which moment his feet clapped together smartly.

Maid Marian fell down upon the turf she laughed so heartily, and fair Laurel wept tears of hilarious fun. Only the bishop looked as sour as a parishioner after giving his fifth tithe, as he lifted his skirt, disclosing bony and spindly legs that wobbled and shook with fright and could not run at all, so stiff they were with age and rheumatism.

"I may go now?" he whimpered.

"Why, surely, if thou wishest," laughed Robin.

As if he wished not! He signaled his retinue with a shaking hand and disappeared with the promptness of a Robin Hood.

"He is taking lessons in departure from thee," laughed Friar Tuck. "And now, maiden, thou hast had a long day and must go to rest in you cottage with sweet Laurel," he continued. "Thinkest thou it was but this morning that my naughty jackdaw killed thy pet merling, and that Sir Guy of Gisborne came to Sherwood on the end of a rope as a cow is led to the fairgrounds at Nottingham?"

"Truly, it has been the longest day I've ever lived," said Maid Marian with a yawn.

So she bade them goodnight and bowed to them prettily and waved her hand. She would have blown them kisses, for they seemed like playmates every one, if she had not felt a shivering little thrill at the thought of Robin Hood's presence. She met his eyes just once and found them upon her directly, with the same open frankness and amusement that she had seen on their

first encounter. It enraged her. "He looketh at me as if I were a pet squirrel, a young fawn at play," she thought. And then she looked for Will Scarlet and found his gaze still more unsatisfactory, for it was serious and tender, as lovesick as De Lacy's! Oh, to find one in between these two, not laughing at her youth, not

finding her perfection.

She felt the soft arm of Laurel about her and turned to go into the little cottage. It was warm and homelike, with a high, downy bed, red flames licking the great oak logs, shadows and a latticed window that framed the stars of night. She looked shyly at fair Laurel, saw the pale gold of her hair, and wondered a little wistfully if it were not more beautiful than her own long red-gold curls. burnished and shining in the firelight. And eyes of deep violet instead of her own nameless gray. And Laurel belonged to the outlaw band in a way, for was not Allin-a-Dale her husband, and was he not an outlaw? Maid Marian bade her a shy goodnight and sank back on the bed, prepared to lie in the shadows thinking and wondering for many hours. Instead, the room faded. the fire died, the world left Sherwood and carried her to a ridiculous country where the ladies of Nottingham leaned out of casement windows and listened to the songs of robins, where the jackdaw ruled the falcon itself, and where Roger de Lacy tried to climb a tree.

She awoke to find Laurel beside her bed, smiling down at her, a refreshing figure in gray-blue that brought out the loveliness of her eves.

"Friar Tuck is calling for thee," she said.

And at that Maid Marian could not help laughing. Such an unromantic suitor for her first morning in Sherwood! Not Robin Hood, the dauntless; not even Will Scarlet, handsome and gay; but corpulent, rotund, saucy Friar Tuck, with his endless sentences of big words and his foolish caperings about on his short fat legs.

And certainly he looked just as she imagined, sitting on a round stone outside her window with the beadyeyed jackdaw on his wrist.

"Ah, Lady Fitzwalter, here is a riddle for thee this morning. Nothing like testing thy wits to see if they have been lost during the night. Listen now and tell me, if thou wilt, what the answer is, and whether it is right thou shalt soon know:

I'm bosom-friend to one of noble blood,
The soldier's comrade, minion of my lord,
And courtier to the king. Sometimes on me
A fair-haired, stately woman lays her hand,
The queenliest daughter of a nobleman.
The bloom of the trees I wear upon my breast!
At times I ride perched on a fiery steed,
Leading the troop. My tongue is dry and hard.
Oft when a seer sings his prophetic song,
I furnish fit reward. Fine is my fashion,
And I am dark of hue. Tell what I'm called.

"I'd say Will Scarlet if it were not for 'I am dark of hue,'" Midge, who had just come on the scene, said with puzzled brow. He's a noble, a soldier, and comrade to Robin, who surely is a king. He's so handsome I'm sure some fair lady has touched his hand—and—"

"Oh, I have it, my pretty merling," said Maid Marian.

"Or my little doxy, boat-tailed grackle—little jackdaw upon my wrist," said the friar.

"What are thy plans for the day?" asked Marian.

"Methought we would prepare for a miracle play," said Friar Tuck. "Long have I wished to do this, but there was none to be property manager and costume mistress. Laurel, thou shalt do the costumes and Marian the properties, and these are the things that we shall need." He rummaged in the cloak that he carried for a torn piece of parchment on which he had printed the following:

A white robe for the Virgin to die in
A holy soul to be got ready (borrow Farmer Timothy's child
that lives over the way and unclothe him)
A crown with twelve stars to put on the child
Torches of white wax
Thunder claps in Paradise
A white cloud
Hell, 14 feet long with a tower of belching flames
Heaven, with gold cobblestones

"Stop, stop," cried Maid Marian. "How dost thou think I can provide those last four items? Friar, thou askest me to perform miracles."

"Well, 'tis a miracle play isn't it?" he answered mischievously.

"Oh, whatever shall I do?" the maiden cried.

"One of the kine mooing loudly will be good enough for a thunder clap—or a barking dog. The white cloud hmm, let me see."

The three sat about with puzzled brows, until Laurel disappeared into the cottage and brought out a white fur robe used by Robin when he went before the Queen.

"An excellent cloud!" exclaimed Friar Tuck.

All that day they worked on their play, and when night came they called forth Robin Hood, who in deep

thought had spent the day in his little grove. In the half-moon green that had seen the play of the Bishop of Hereford the day before, the outlaws performed the miracle. And with the dim firelight lending an air of illusion, it became a miracle. Robin turned startled eyes upon the figure of Maid Marian, no longer the impulsive, vivacious child of Lord Hugh. She stood easily, a dignified grace about her bearing, holding the little naked child in her arms. Her face looked down upon it, her curving mouth smiling the elusive smile of the Virgin. And the wondrous part of it was that she was not acting. It was her smile, mischievous, vet wistful, a symbol of her gay yet tender nature. Here was her happy heart reflected. Here were her unanswered dreams in the sad little droop at the corners of her red lips. If she had met his eyes, perchance the illusion would have vanished. He would have seen the imperious little tomboy, the proud lady of Nottingham, only a charming maiden—for any of these things she was, and any of these left no mark on Robin Hood's heart. But she did not look at him. She was, for a brief moment, an image of the Virgin, a swaying, brooding figure in the firelight, with a sweet brow and a smile of mystery that lives undying through the ages.

He slipped quietly away into the forest, deeply moved. Later, he came back to the crescent green, hoping to resurrect the memory of the miracle from the dark shadows. But he found a strange transformation had taken place. Back and forth in the moonlight danced the graceful figure of Maid Marian, and her sharp young voice was heard from time to time, "Nay, Midge, this way with that foot, and that way with this."

"But I shall always do this way with this," mourned

poor awkward Midge.

"Is this right, Maid Marian?" cried Will Stutely, bouncing along like a plump little partridge out for its daily walk.

"We—11, that's a lot better, truly," she answered.

Then Will Scarlet stepped forward, and the moonlight turned his hair to silver and his jerkin to black. Taking Maid Marian in his arms, they moved in unison to the faint music of Allin-a-Dale's lute, and their dance was a perfect thing of grace, softly retreating and return-

ing, a swaying motion of melody.

Robin Hood saw her face, and it was not the same expression at all as that he had seen in the miracle. Upturned to Will's, her drowsy beautiful eyes were brooding in strange contradiction to a laughing girlish mouth. She, dancing in silver gossamer, was like a princess in a book, as fragile as porcelain. Robin Hood looked unmoved upon her loveliness while the world careened in front of Will Scarlet's eyes. Night and heaven and earth were one in the glory of the dance. And each man wondered what she truly was —a woman blessed by Heaven with the smile of the Sacred Mary, and the magic cloak of charm given to her through some enchantment, or only the little lost child of Lord Hugh, eager to dance and be gay and driven into a mood of sadness by the fateful circumstances that had befallen her.

Book the seventh



A NOBLER RÔLE THAN OUTLAW ROBIN HOOD PLIES ANOTHER TRADE

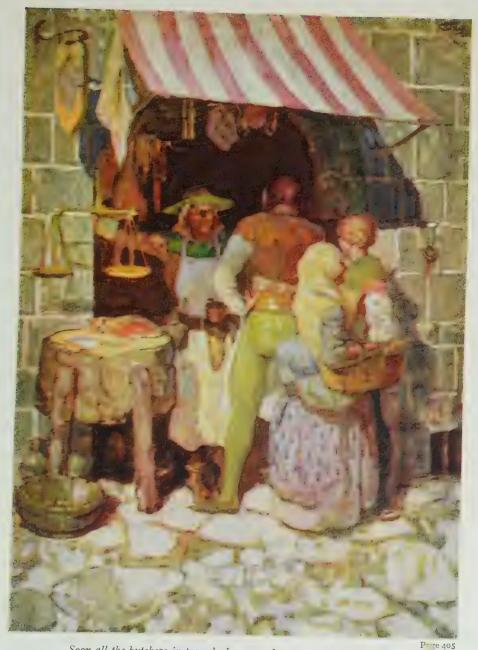
If the outlaws wondered as to the true disposition of Lady Fitzwalter, they could not have spent a longer time in pondering than did Maid Marian herself. Each day there was someone new to learn to know, someone whom she would discover finally was little different from the young squires of Nottingham, boyish and enthusiastic and bearing few marks of the gifts that make a man a creator.

She had wakened with the dawn, and for the first time since she could remember longed to leave her soft bed. It had been her wont, as it is that of most young bodies, to see the moon set rather than the sun rise. to see the last pale star sink below the horizon and then to close her eyes until high noon of the day following. The mystery and beauty of night were companions to her loneliness, and the shadows seemed filled with unseen shapes that did not frighten her. But there was something special about this day. She knew it when she awoke and counted on her fingers the short time that remained before her fortnight was up in Sherwood. Only another day, and that to be taken up with long goodbys-goodby to the Vale of Peace, to Cathedral Lane, to the jackdaw, to the friar, to Midge, Will Stutely, Sawney—all of them. And this was her last day to play with them with no interruption or consciousness of her

position. She could run wild in the forest until another night, a lady outlaw, she told herself happily.

Out through the latticed windows, then, not to disturb Laurel, who lay like a snow statue, her pale gold hair tossed over the pillow to show one delicate ear and an almost bovish curve to her cheek without the scalloped waves of gold to hide it. "She is indeed lovely. I wish I were pale and gold instead of this brownness," Maid Marian sighed. But out in the wind there was no room for vanity. She ran and laughed, and then stopped fearfully lest someone had heard her. How dreadful to be caught talking aloud! And to be seen skipping! She had a sudden feeling of bigness, as if she had shot up to an incredible height, and her hands had extended far from her dainty sleeves, and her neck grown long. She tried to hide her awkwardness by swinging along with careless ease. A startled squirrel dashed past her feet and looked so small she wondered if she had straved into an enchanted forest. She longed for another human being with whom to compare herself to see if she were still the same as always. "I should not like to be the only person in the world," she shivered, "or even a hermit shut off from the sight of men." And then when these strange thoughts had begun to worry her, when her loneliness had magnified her being until she seemed almost to have grown physically, she heard the deep tones of Friar Tuck speaking a morning sermon to his little jackdaw:

"What art thou good for, little boat-tailed grackle? By the good St. Dunstan, is't that thou art resting on thy wings of glory since the defeat of Lady Fitzwalter's merling? So that's it, indeed. Thou art lazy, little



Soon all the butchers in town had managed to spy upon Robin Hood



sluggard. Come, I will bear thy impudence no longer. I will give thy feathers a sharp little pull to make thee aware, well aware, that I am thy master. And thou shalt—listen to me I say! Cock thine ear and listen to me—thou shalt attack before nightfall a sedge of herons, a herd of swans, a covert of cootes, a gaggle of geese, a muster of peacocks, a bevy of quails, a covey of partridges, a congregation of plovers, a flight of doves, a watch of nightingales, a murmuration of starlings—"

"Oh, stop! He will die listening to thee," laughed Maid Marian, "or else grow murderous and savage at the thought of so much prey. I know now, friar, why thou seemest to know so many words. Thou just sayest all that thou knowest, when most of us are content to

use but a few."

"Content, thou sayest? I should answer thee, 'Thou art too lazy, damsel, to improve thy speech'!"

"But, Father, why should I chatter till I had no breath left and till the day was done with little time for aught else? Dost thou never think?"

"At all times, maiden. I think as I speak."

"In words and more words and still more, friar? Why, I think in half sentences and pictures and —"

"Thou art a maiden and afraid to express all thy secret thoughts. I am an old man and have no secrets

left, least of all from myself."

"Tomorrow I must go to London town," Maid Marian sighed, "where everyone has secrets that I do not understand. Secret plans to depose Richard, dark hidden plots to make all the nobles of England swear fealty to John, Earl of Mortain, that he may be the recognized king as well as the king in his own eyes."

"Yea, but tomorrow thou goest to the gayest city in

the world, daughter."

"And who art thou to talk of gayety, Friar Tuck? For shame! A priest in holy cassock thinking of earthly

pleasures!"

"Thou wouldst not chide me, daughter, for a bit of worldliness. Whose heart would not be stirred at the thought of the court at London? Oh, such minstrels as sing there! Troubadours who have followed Eleanor from France, paid balladmongers brought in by William de Longchamp. Dost thou not think I would make an excellent poemsmith?" And running forward with a little caper, Friar Tuck lifted his robes and said with an air of deep piety:

I pinch the light of my sacred taper And lift my frock for a merry caper. Then when I tire of these affairs, I find sweet slumber over my prayers.

"Oh, thou wouldst be more than a moderate success in London town," laughed Maid Marian. "Perchance thou will come along with me."

"Nay, nay, forever nay," he cried with a red face. "Go to London, walk with the mincing steps of the Bishop of Hereford, bow and bow and bow at the feet of this great man and that, and never once have room to kick, or body to tickle, or being to tease—"

"Or have body to tease thee," said a laughing voice over his shoulder, and Maid Marian looked up to see the giant figure of Little John bending over fat little Friar Tuck, saw him seize the churchman as if he were a baby, and rocked him to an fro in his great arms, while he crooned to him in a hoarse voice, "Lulley, lulley, lulley." And that seemed to be a signal, for forth from the thickets came countless outlaws bearing milk for the infant, and they poured the mild liquid down the roaring throat of Friar Tuck, and all cried:

"Hush, thou little one, hush, hush!"

Maid Marian laughed until she sank down upon the mossy turf. Never had she seen such companionship, such unlimited bounds of mirth and laughter as in the greenwood. But their pranks were never just played upon themselves. A day did not pass but some noble obeyed their bantering commands, a priest bowed to them with such irregular bobbings he might have been doing a dance, and hermits sang and singers were silent. 'Twas an upside down world, a topsy-turvy delight, in Sherwood.

So Marian was not surprised when Robin appeared from his lookout on the cliff above the Vale of Peace, saying that a butcher riding a mare bearing vast quantities of meat was following the road to Nottingham. Even a butcher could be of some importance if the outlaws wanted an adventure.

"Master, do not tell us that thou art going to try a trick on the sheriff again," cried Midge, his face screwed into an expression of deep anxiety.

"Why not, young fellow?" said Robin with a touch of imperiousness.

"Why, Master, he expecteth thee! Thou hast done a similar thing before."

"Then he doth not expect me, Midge. Learn to look into another's mind. The sheriff would not expect me to do exactly the same trick twice. Only fools act in such a manner. He thinketh I am a wily bird and up

to innumerable pranks, different and ingenious in manner. Therefore I shall act like the stupid bird he doth not expect and play the same trick again upon him."

"May we not come with thee, Master?" pleaded

the boy.

"Nay," said Robin, his face turned eagerly toward the road, his sensitive nostrils seeming to sniff the very air in his excitement to be off.

Hiding in the thickets, the little group of outlaws and Lady Fitzwalter saw this much of the drama that Robin Hood was to enact that day.

He strolled indolently down to the fork of the road near the outlaw camp where peddlers and all manner of tradesmen were wont to pass to turn toward the village of Nottingham. He affected a look of delight and curiosity as the butcher neared him.

"Art thou a butcher, now?" he said with his winning

smile.

"That is what I seem to be, is it not? Why then dost thou ask concerning a thing so evident?" said the butcher crossly.

"Because I know little of the trades. I have been suddenly bereft of my fortune and must find some way of livelihood. I wish to buy from some worthy tradesman his outfit and advice that I may spend what money I have left wisely and well. I have met thus far with passing misfortune. On buying barrels of oil from a huxter to start myself in that worthy trade, I found that the villain had poured water and beer into the kegs, and that the oil I saw on the top was nowhere else but the top. The drapers show me their goods in the poorest of lights, so that I cannot tell whether the cloth is green or blue.

The wineshop keepers spin out long names for their wines—Crete, Roumania, Provence, Monterosso, Riviera, Muscatel, and the taste is that of the poorest ale. There is no honesty in England, and I wish to be a tradesman of some sort that I may begin an honest trade."

"Thou art indeed a strange fellow," said the butcher. "But if thou canst give me four marks for the flesh I carry and my bonny mare, 't will not be too dear, though I warn thee now that if thou intendest to run an honest trade, thou wilt have many a sorry moment. When other butchers in the guild say that their calve's flesh is three weeks old and it is scarce a week, and thou tellest them 'tis only a week, they will of course buy from thy neighbor. But all that is thine own affair. If thou canst afford to be honest, by all means be an honest man."

Robin Hood paid the butcher the four marks, and with the obvious and lengthy advice of the tradesman in his ears set forth to Nottingham. He showed not the slightest knowledge of the peeping eyes of Friar Tuck and the others as he passed the thicket. When Robin Hood played a part, his disguise lay not only in his costume. It lay in his actions, the quiver of his eyes, the very thoughts of his mind. It is doubtful if the great outlaw chief was even aware of his band so near to him, so busy was he in thinking what a good butcher would be thinking while on his way to the village to sell his meats.

Now when Robin Hood came to Nottingham he went straightway to the head of the Butchers' Guild to gain permission to sell his flesh on the little winding street where the members of that particular trade had their stands. And soon all the butchers in town had managed to spy upon the outlaw, and they laughed heartily among themselves, for he handled the meats with an unpracticed hand and put prices upon them that were twice too little.

"He will make nary a penny, the fool!" said old

Simon, the most aged butcher of them all.

But they laughed at him for only an hour or two, for not only was the new butcher in Nottingham not making any money for himself, but he was also keeping the others from making any. Since he sold more meat for one penny than others did for five, the shrewd housewives of the village of course bought only from him.

"Something must be done," cried Simon, and he set

off for the sheriff's home to make complaint.

"We shall give the butchers' banquet this very night," said the sheriff, "and I shall sit next to this green young man and tell him a few things. Perchance," he added, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction, "he may turn out to be some prodigal that hath sold his father's land and is throwing his money away carelessly. We can surely teach him to throw it away so that it may be of more benefit to us."

Old Simon listened not to the sheriff's words, but hurried to the booth of the new butcher. He wore his most bloody butcher's apron and carried his big knife carelessly. "Ho, young fellow, how clean thou lookest! If thou wishest to be a true butcher, thou must look the part. The executioner and the butcher do not wear clean aprons."

"What is it thou wishest?" said Robin Hood, fighting down the disgust that filled him at the butcher's words.

"Tonight the sheriff of Nottingham gives the Butchers' Guild its yearly banquet. Thou art one of us, and we ask thee to dine with us."

Robin Hood thanked him courteously, and when he was gone a steely look came into the outlaw's eyes. If the sheriff could have seen the sudden change in the appearance of the untutored butcher, he would certainly have withdrawn his invitation.

Robin Hood entered the sheriff's house that night with a feeling of deep amusement. It was all he could do to remember he must not let them know he had been there before. He chuckled to himself as he thought of his former visits, and hoped that he would not see the sheriff's wife, for she had been very kind to him, and he was, besides, a little afraid that his disguise might not hold beneath her inquisitive eyes. Men are more apt to take a man on his standing, but women wish to see for themselves. The sheriff's dame, however, was not there, for she liked not the great banquet given to all the butchers of Nottingham, where the jokes were coarse and the wine flowed freely, since the sheriff did not pay for any of this display from his own pocket, but dipped into the city treasury for the funds.

"I think that thou hadst better say the grace, new-comer," said the sheriff, winking at the other butchers.

Robin Hood guessed that this was some form of play, since they all laughed, and he supposed they did not any of them say a grace before their meals. He rose quietly, and something in his voice compelled them to silence as he said, "Pray God bless us all and our meat within this place."

Then just as swift a change came again into his voice, and from the quiet and rather shy young newcomer, he turned into a man of affairs, a good fellow that leads, and that finds no difficulty in soliciting followers. "More

wine, more wine!" he shouted, banging the table with his fists as he had seen the sheriff do on more than one occasion. "No matter how dear it be, I shall pay the reckoning."

This generosity, along with the lordly banging upon the table, impressed the little sheriff tremendously. "I' faith," he whispered to Simon, "he is no doubt made of gold and silver. Some prodigal, I tell thee, who hath sold his father's lands and is trying to rid himself of the money therefrom. I have an excellent plan to rob him by seeming to buy of him, Simon."

"What is thy plan? He may be more shrewd than he looketh. Or perchance he hath nary a penny, and

this is but his play with thee."

"Nay, nay, stupid," said the sheriff. "Let not opportunity pass by like this. Newcomer, hast thou any horned beasts to sell?"

"Yea, three or four hundred," replied Robin carelessly. "I'faith, I never keep track of them and their children and their children's children. I suppose they grow and multiply like all manner of living things. It interesteth me not."

"Wouldst thou truly sell them to me?" asked the sheriff, scarce able to keep the eagerness from his voice.

"Why, of course, if thou choosest to come with me and see them. Thou must be satisfied with thy buy, for I am an honest butcher and I hate to see a customer uneasy about his purchases."

"He is too simple to be true," murmured Simon.

But the sheriff believed in waiting not longer than the opportunity. Fearing that the stranger might change his mind, he said quickly, "Let us go, then, at once, before darkness cometh upon us, that I may see thy cattle and purchase them and return them here this very night."

So Robin climbed into the sheriff's little cart drawn by two white horses, and the two set forth like two companion magistrates discussing the village affairs and intent on the same purposes. Little did the sheriff know that the purposes of Robin were as different from his own as they could possibly be.

As they neared the crossroads that led into Sherwood Forest, the sheriff stirred a little restlessly and fastened his eyes upon Robin uneasily. But the young butcher drove the cart as if he were the sheriff's own servant, saying from time to time, "Do I jolt thee, Master? Shall I tell the mares to go more slowly? We are nearly there."

The sheriff answered not the words of his companion. He spent his time anxiously surveying the shadowy ditches beside the road, and murmuring, "God keep us from a man they call Robin Hood!"

Suddenly, as if called by a master, a herd of deer, a hundred head or more, came tripping across the road directly in front of Robin Hood and the sheriff.

"Why, here they are! How like them to come and meet thee, their new master," said Robin Hood mischievously. "They be fat and fair, these horned beasts thou didst ask me about, sheriff, and gladly I'll sell them to thee." With that Robin gave a strange cry and the deer turned and fled into the thickest and darkest part of the forest.

"Oh, we must catch them," cried Robin gleefully, and, whipping the white horses, he turned the little cart

straight toward the dark glades, standing aloft in his excitement, spurring the horses on to greater speed with loud shouting as he skillfully drove them between the narrowest aisles of trees. The little cart shook and plunged from side to side like a shipwrecked schooner high upon a rock, swinging and balancing in wind and wave, never quite falling, but always leaning at an amazing and unsafe angle. The sheriff cried angrily and fearfully, "Hold, hold, I like thee not! Thou hast played a joke on me, and now thou art carrying it too far. Dost thou not know these are the glades of Robin Hood and we must keep well away from them?"

"But we must catch those horned beasts that thou art going to buy," said Robin as if he were a stupid youth intent upon a bargain. "And perchance this Robin can help us catch them. Robin, I say! Robin!" he began to call in a loud voice, while the sheriff, nearly prostrated with fear, tried to calm him, first by commands and then by entreaties.

"How darest thou? I am the sheriff of Nottingham. I shall have thee beheaded, fool. Stop, I command thee. Oh, stop, stop, I prithee. Anything thou wishest thou shalt have, if thou wilt only stop."

The loud cries had brought all the outlaws running. Imagining some harm had come to their master or to one of them as they heard the frenzied shouts for "Robin," they penetrated the thickets swiftly. And what was this they came upon? Robin Hood, with feet widespread, with hands holding the straining reins, driving a frail little cart that rocked like a wind-swept sea, round and round in never-ending circles, between trees, over rocks, up hills and then round again, over the same rocks,

the same hills, and calling his own name, wildly and with apparent anxiety, "Robin, I say! Where is he whom they call Robin Hood?" And with him the sheriff, knocked to his knees in the shaking cart, praying and mumbling and crying with pain, "Stop! Oh, my shin, good Mary! Oh Michael! All saints, relieve me!"

And then Robin saw the outlaws and pulled the cart to so sudden a stop that the sheriff turned a graceful and immediate somersault, landing on the grass at the feet of Lady Fitzwalter in an attitude of reverence.

"That is the noblest thing I have ever seen thee do," said the voice of the young butcher. But the sheriff detected a slightly different note in the tones of the young man he had thought so easy and so open to robbery. Furtively he lifted his gross head. Round and red his face looked, with heavy pouches beneath his eyes and a straggling beard that ill became him. And meeting the cold grave face of the man in the cart, he hid his head in his arms and moaned anew. "How could I have mistaken thee? Thou lookest exactly like that potter, that wicked potter who turned out to be Robin. Yet I would have sworn that thou didst act and speak and yea, even look the part of a prodigal son newly come into riches, playing at being a butcher."

"And it was thine intent to buy my cattle far below the price they should have brought," said Robin sternly. "Come, thou wouldst have cheated me badly if I had let thee."

"Dinner is ready," said the voice of Little John. And that again meant doom for the sheriff, for all over England men knew that Robin Hood would not dine unless he had a special guest. And the guest was either

someone he liked and treated as a member of his band, or one that he had little respect for, and to him the price of the dinner was made very high and was collected at once.

So the sheriff struggled over the rich food, unable to enjoy the venison, for it reminded him of the herd of deer that Robin Hood had pretended were the cattle to be sold, and unable to drink the ale since he knew he must pay for it. After a while Robin said, "Little John, bring the sheriff his portmanteau and save him the bother of drawing forth his purse to pay for the banquet."

And Little John, grinning broadly, opened the sheriff's purse and took forth its ill-gotten gains, three hundred

pounds in all.

Then Robin Hood brought forth the little cart with the white horses and gravely helped the fat little sheriff into it. Taking the reins in his hands, the sheriff clucked angrily at the horses, a foolish little cluck that sounded like a chicken eagerly surveying its dinner. And eagerly the sheriff surveyed the road to Nottingham. Hunched down in his seat like a little fat gnome, he looked as if he were trying to draw his little crooked body through the door of his little narrow soul to hide from the sight of these brave and straightforward outlaws.

"Oh, remember me to thy wife at home, good dame that she is!" cried Robin Hood after him. And a peasant passing along the Nottingham road wondered a little vaguely who the sheriff's friends were in Sherwood Forest.

"Dost thou never tire of these pranks, so many alike and with so little unexpectedness?" asked Maid Marian.

"Why, all of life is unexpected," said Robin Hood. "Who knoweth what may occur next? Some day the

sheriff may put up a brave fight and put us all in the dungeon of Nottingham Castle."

"Oh, thou art teasing me! Thou knowest that his nature can never change, any more than Sir Guy's can. They are cowards, both of them, and I should think that thou wouldst be tired of even encountering them again."

"Nay, Lady Fitzwalter, one never knoweth what may happen, I insist. Oftentimes I lose the battle, and then there is the fun of finding out what manner of sportsman my victor may be. Those who have fine spirits thou seest near me—Little John, who beat me in a hand to hand encounter, Will Scarlet, even Little Midge who played a most amusing trick upon us all. But those who are bloated, bragging victors we let go, and in the end they are not victors, for they cannot be one of us in the greenwood."

"Thou must number me among those not a victor, then," said Maid Marian sadly, "for tomorrow thou hast decreed I go hence from this lovely spot. Thou hast said I cannot be one of you in the greenwood."

Robin Hood looked at her in startled wonder. Could she be serious in her pleas to remain in Sherwood? Could it be that the haughty and disdainful Lady Fitzwalter really wished to come to the greenwood? Nay, his mind told him, 'twas but a child's desire for the moon, a spoiled little wench's momentary demand, to be dismissed as soon as it was granted. And that went against the only rule of the greenwood, that whoever came must stay, that whatever secrets of the band were learned must be buried safely in one's heart and never tossed aside. The outlaw could not be sure of the maiden. Did she know her own heart? Was she urged by vanity

to be the only woman in the band? Was she lonely and in need of companionship until her father's return? Her father's return—the picture struck the mind of Robin with amazing clarity. Lord Hugh would never return, and Lord Hugh's message was his to give to Lady Fitzwalter. Better to tell her now, perchance, and put her out of the life of the outlaws forever. Tell her and send her away to London, with no excuse for another encounter. He opened his lips to speak, but meeting her dark eyes' wistful gaze, he could find no words to dismiss her. He cherished the message that would bring her back again.

"Thou rememberest 'twas but a thought of mine that Oueen Eleanor might be a wondrous companion for thee with her tales of the Court of Love, her countless memories of troubadours of Provence and Poitou. Thou needst not go to London if thy heart aches at the thought of it. But listen a moment. There are, maiden, queens in every land, in every age, but some few live forever. Their lives are printed in curling colorful initials like those in a monk's copybook, so that none pass their histories by as dreary reading. Eleanor is a figure who lingers. Her stubborn clinging to her youth, her curious ignoring of John's treachery against Richard when both men are her sons. Is she bereft of lovalties? Once Queen of France, then Queen of England! Whence could spring her loyalty? For loyalty to one land belies loyalty to another. A curious enigma, a powerful. swarthy old woman who manages, instead, to be a queen of mystery, with a heart still young and a body so cared for and arrayed that she conveys in her seventieth year an illusion of old ivory and soft parchment. Think upon

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it, damsel—to be near her. Intimate hours with a queen whose name will not soon die."

"I shall go tomorrow to London to stay with Queen Eleanor until I have news of my father," said Lady Fitzwalter, quite as if it were her own plan and not Robin Hood's.

"And may we accompany thee, my lady?" said Robin Hood, kneeling before her.

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"I wish I were not going," were the words that filled Maid Marian's mind. It seemed to her that she was deserting all that meant happiness to her, all that called forth the better side of her. In Nottingham, which was a tiny pattern of London town, she had paced the restless square of courtyard a hundred times a day, her gentle nature warring at the solitude, the unwelcome intrusions upon her that were a thousand times worse than loneliness. She had sat with the other maidens of the town with her sewing that would not behave and turn out nicely as the other damsels' did, and she had walked with Roger de Lacy and his like, charming, indolent men who whispered words of love, who sang gay songs, who drank much red wine, and knew little of the world. or cared to know. And the result had been that she had thought a great deal about herself and grown ill-natured and imperious and rebellious. In Sherwood no one paid any attention to her. She was one of the outlaw band. and there were so many that none had time for the particular praise of another. And here she did not think upon her own small woes. She forgot her own importance and looked to the importance of the Queen of England to whom she was going, and listened to the importance of Richard the Lion-Hearted who wanted England, and not just himself to be great. She learned quickly and absorbed avidly all the gossip of the nation, that was so much more important than gossip of the villagers of

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Nottingham. She felt as if going away would stop her schooling, and that she would be again Lady Fitzwalter, only patterned even more exactly on the ways of the other ladies of the court, wearing royal blue because they all did, when sea green became her dark gray eyes the better, speaking in a high affected voice because the other damsels did, when her natural tones were deep and musical. She could see herself being twisted and pulled into a willowy figure, her nut-brown skin coated with delicate powders, and her hair, that hung in short curling tendrils like the petals of a bluebell, stretched high on her head in a splendid coiffure that would make her look as old as the Queen herself, she thought passionately.

"I wish I were not going!" She said it aloud, petulantly and impudently, hoping all the outlaws would hear her.

But if they heard they gave no answer. She was treated as one of them, and if one of them had put his wishes into words when those words contradicted the plans of Robin Hood, none would have heard him, or admitted hearing. Only Midge, whose heart was too soon made sad by the whims and worries of others, crept near her and touched her hand shyly.

"Thou wilt soon be as merry as a marriage bell," he said.

"So I shall, perhaps," she answered with her head a little higher. But Robin Hood saw that her eyes seemed to blaze into shining lights beneath the shimmer of their tears.

"Thou shalt come soon again," he found himself saying.

And after that it seemed not at all hard to go, for when one can come back, goodbys are not so sad. And when a tremor of youthful fear touched her heart, she pushed it from her. What if the outlaw camp were captured by Earl John and all its inhabitants thrown into prison? If Robin should die on one of his reckless adventures? If she should find herself in London, so many miles from Sherwood, powerless to return? Nay, she must only remember his words, "Thou shalt come soon again."

"And now, how am I to travel?" she cried. "On a white horse with Will Scarlet to protect me? Thou knowest I have seen him in tournament and have a great confidence in his riding. Or perchance Little John will carry me in his arms, as he carries Friar Tuck? Or mayhap Robin will lead me by a rope," she added demurely.

"It is a surprise," blurted Will Stutely, "a most remarkable chariot. Oh," he cried, clapping his hand over his mouth. "There, I've told! I knew I would. You shouldn't have told me! You know I can't keep a secret."

"And thou art to be the Queen of the Forest," said Peter Clifton dreamily, his serious eyes intent on Maid Marian's lovely face.

"And my back aches from picking flowers for thee," said Friar Tuck, hobbling about with his palm at his spine.

"And what is the matter with thee?" Lady Fitzwalter said to dainty Will Scarlet.

"Why, I have soiled a hand for thee too," he cried, showing a spotless palm.

And then from the still forest the note of a horn was heard, three clear plaintive calls, longer than the quick,

sharp blasts that Robin Hood used to call his men to his aid. At once a curious, murmurous singing arose, and Maid Marian stood very quiet, listening as it swelled louder and louder until it was like a great heroic hymn played on an organ. And when it seemed that its glory could hold no longer, and when the tears blinded her eyes so that she could not see, the singing changed to that delightful finale of whirring bird calls and bleatings and baaings of animals, that mischievous imitation of nature that made the true birds and beasts cock their ears in wonder and then come out to see what it all could mean.

Robin Hood's chorus, the song of Sherwood, full of beauty and sadness and majesty, and then this marvelous undercurrent of mockery. She held out her hands to them and they bade her goodby, the little apprentice outlaws, as she had named those who had just joined the band and had not been there long enough for their names to be well known like Midge's and Will Scarlet's; the host of men who spent only part of their days with Robin, and the rest tilling the soil, minding the sheep, and living in Nottingham lives above reproach; and finally, the close little band of men that she had come to know as the merry men, those who were the subject of gay ballads, of magic tales—Little John, Friar Tuck, Allin-a-Dale, and the other familiar ones.

"But we are going with thee," they cried. Disappearing into the thickets for a moment, they led forth a little chestnut mare, high-spirited and sensitive, with a glossy red-brown coat and soft brown eyes.

"We have thought that thou art too much one of us to find much joy in a flower-lined chariot," smiled Robin Hood. "And we told Will Stutely thou wouldst travel on a horse-litter of flowers, knowing full well he could not keep it secret, and thus the real secret was kept. Such a chariot is for any Queen of the May, any lady of Nottingham, but this fiery little steed is too spirited for the safe handling of many a man. She hath a feminine disposition, vastly unsure of just what she wisheth, yet open to reason if she be spoken to the right way. Thou, Lady Marian, we feel canst manage her, perchance from a study of thine own spirited nature."

And she saw that they were doing their best to please her and to make her feel, not like a temporary guest at Sherwood, but like one of them. She was to ride a matchless steed, attended by some danger as an outlaw would truly be, and not a soft snow-maiden like Elaine of Camelot, waiting in maidenly silence in a high tower for the return of Launcelot, and floating down the river on a flower couch. Nay, the Lady Fitzwalter would ride a horse into London town that would bring many an eye upon her and that would arouse many a word of praise and envy.

She mounted the little steed. The mare tossed her head, danced for a moment, reared, and then as suddenly quieted at a low nameless murmur from Maid Marian. Standing steadily and quietly the little brown horse awaited the command of her rider. Maid Marian looked full into the eyes of Robin Hood for a moment, challenging him to praise her. Then she realized that if she were one of the outlaw band, this command over her horse would be expected of her and not be considered a clever trick to be lauded. She flushed a little, and then waving her hand gayly to the assembled outlaws, she turned from them and, sitting very straight, she

lifted the reins of her horse and said with quaint and masculine abruptness:

"Ready, Sire."

The horses galloped with such speed that words between the riders were impossible. It was a silent journey, fraught with the magic of night and the silver road. The feeling of intensity that Lady Fitzwalter had borne that last day in Sherwood left her heart. Here was quiet tranquillity, for every muscle was taut, every sense alert that her understanding of the chestnut mare be perfect and that her ride be as smooth and rhythmical a thing as that of her companions. She knew that Will Scarlet's eyes were upon her more than once, testing her strength in the quiet surveillance of her upright body and steady hands. She turned to smile at him. and saw his face in return, a blurred image of kindness. She turned as swiftly back to her horse and she talked to herself silently, as she had done when she was a small, lonely child in the gardens at Dallom Lea, setting for herself some tremendous task like climbing the great yew tree: "Go on, dear, it isn't hard. Truly, it isn't hard"—perchance only senseless murmurings, but the reassuring answers to her lonely and courageous heart.

So they rode all the night long, and it was on the morning of a gray day that they came into London, a city of streets veiled in gray mist, of towers that were but the vague outlines of indistinct masses of stone, and houses that seemed to have no roofs. The people who walked in the squares were shadows moving on silent, padded feet, so that they appeared with startling unexpectedness—white faces in the mist—and then were swallowed up again.

"Art thou not glad to be here?" said Robin.

"Yea, I must speak truly," replied Lady Fitzwalter. "There is that about London town that always delighteth me whether it be bathed in sunshine and shadow like any English village or cloaked in the fog that taketh away all its familiarity. Already I hear the minstrels singing in the court and see the velvets worn by noble ladies, and my grubby brown little hands holding these reins so tightly, Master, will soon flirt a fan, thus and so, hiding my mouth, my eyes, my ear-tip from those courtly gentlemen of London who beg my favors."

"I'faith, Master, I grow eager myself to taste the life of romance and idleness when I hear her speak of

it," sighed Will Scarlet.

"Perchance thy desire will be fulfilled," smiled Robin Hood," if the Lady Fitzwalter shouldst send for thee to keep her company."

"Nay, I like you all best in the forest," sighed Maid Marian. "And it is thou who wilt send for me. Remem-

berest thou thy promise?"

"Yea, and so it shall be," said Robin Hood.

Queen Eleanor, already notified of Lady Fitzwalter's arrival, met her gladly.

"It is time that I traveled to Provence again. The gray and melancholy London wearies me. Perchance thou knowest that my wayward John is striving to play awhile with England. He can do little harm, so I prefer to let him think the toy is his possession rather than to wrangle with him. Richard in chains—we can do little to aid him," she said with the characteristic gesture of helplessness that John had so often used. "But there

are those who can and will. John's endeavors to keep him a prisoner may hold him there for another year, but letters signed by the Bishop of Rouen and mine own hand have gone to the Pope begging him to intervene, and we have solicited from the people of England their king's ransom."

"And I have heard that thou hast not collected enough to pay his enemies," said Robin Hood ironically, for he knew that the court of London boasted untold wealth.

Queen Eleanor looked at him from her shrewd dark eyes, trying to detect reproach in his manner. But the outlaw met her gaze with all the surety of a courtly prince, unaffected and casual as if he held little interest in this intrigue against the King, as if the fact that England had failed to give money for the rescue of its lawful sovereign meant no more to him than that lack of rain was holding up the autumn crops.

Suddenly a fool in motley dress of yellow and sapphire, lingering near, overheard their conversation. At once he jumped to the center of a small stage at one end of the hall. Winding gayly colored ribbons about his hands and feet, he lay upon the floor. His meaning was at once clear to those who watched. Eyes gleaming with mockery, impersonating his king who lay in chains in the Black Tower, he sang the song that had reached England but a few days before, written secretly by Richard and sent by some faithful messenger to his people. The fool could do what no other man in England would have dared to do—play lightly with a nation's secret—flaunt gayly the skeletons in its shadows. With no mean ability at disguise of expression and voice, the

song of Richard broke the staid calm of the great hall, a passionate and reproachful cry:

No wretched captive of his prison speaks Unless with pain and bitterness of soul; Yet consolation from the muse he seeks Whose voice alone misfortune can control. Where now is each ally, each baron, friend, Whose face I ne'er beheld without a smile? Will none, his sovereign to redeem, expend The smallest portion of his treasure vile?

The Queen's pale face flushed a deep red. With a low cry she stopped the singer from continuing the rest of the song. With a shrug of his slim shoulders and a shrewd smile, the motley fool slipped from the room.

"Farewell, friends," said Lady Fitzwalter with quiet dignity, already assuming unconsciously the manners and

bearing of the court ladies.

Robin Hood felt his heart twist sharply with pain. Had he plunged this child into an atmosphere of dark and subtle treachery, of foolish and vain artifice? Still, she would love the forest all the more, and those deeply rooted there.

"Farewell," they all cried, and each thought that she looked upon him alone in goodby, for her soft gray eyes embraced them all together, and looking at her was like being told some wonderful thing about oneself.

"Little lady-in-waiting," smiled Queen Eleanor, "I could almost hope that thy father is a long time coming

for thee."

So the outlaws left their lovely charge and, looking back, they saw her already touching the tip of her russet boot and saying with charming enthusiasm, "I'd like a

LADY FITZWALTER ESCORTED TO LONDON 425

gown right to there, Your Majesty, that I may lose a little of this babyish air."

And Queen Eleanor saw in the golden brown skin, the chestnut hair, and dark gray eyes, a reflection of her own youthfulness, her own self of ivory and black, and she murmured happily, "Let the gown be the color of cream, cut into a deep V to thy waist with an undervest of scarlet and seed pearls, and let there be about thy slender waist a golden girdle, linked by the most skillful goldsmith and set with stones of fire."

Will Scarlet sighed more deeply than the others as

they passed out of hearing of this intimacy.

"I am in sore need of an adventure to put me back into the spirit of outlawry," said Little John. "It seemed for a moment as if we all belonged in the court, attending the words of fair ladies and listening to the honest songs of minstrels."

"Aye," said Robin, "I too need an adventure."

So it was when they left London and gained the highway leading north to Nottingham, they noticed a tinker taking the same route.

"Methinks I will accost this fellow," said Robin Hood. "Fall somewhat behind me, comrades, and let me see if I can find some amusement on my way home."

The other outlaws then took a roadway that forked off from the highway, that their master might pursue his fun undisturbed.

"Hast thou just come from London?" inquired Robin Hood. "And hast thou heard the sad news there?"

"I have just come from London, certainly," said the tinker stolidly, "but news, nay, I heard no news at all.

I'faith, I never hear any news," he ended somewhat

aggrievedly.

"Twas this," said Robin boastfully, with the air of one imparting a great secret. "Two men of thine own trade, two tinkers, I tell thee, were thrown into the stocks for the drinking of too much ale and beer."

"If that be all, then I missed no news," said the tinker in a bored tone, "for that occurs every day. And anyhow, I go away from London to a little town where I can drink all that I please."

"And where is it that thou art going?" said Robin

Hood politely.

"Nottingham, a town of twice told fame, first for the castle there that King John liketh better than the court of London and where he stayeth much of his time, and secondly for the bold outlaw, Robin Hood, who liveth on the outskirts of the village."

"And why is it thou art going to Nottingham? To see Earl John?" said Robin.

"Nay, nay. And thou hadst better not let that gentleman hear thee calling him earl when he considereth himself king," reproved the tinker. "Nay, I go to see Robin Hood. I have in my purse a warrant from

the King's men for the arrest of the rascal."

"And why art thou undertaking this perilous task?" said Robin Hood.

"Oh, I cannot be much hurt, for I have heard that this outlaw doth not make a specialty of killing, and there is an hundred pound reward for his arrest. I say thee, I weary a little of the long journey alone. Join with me in the hunt for this Robin and I'll share the reward with thee."

"Let me see the warrant first," said Robin Hood, "that I may see that thou tellest the truth. If it be in full accord with the law, I'll go with thee gladly, and we'll take this forest bird when the shadows of night fall."

"Nay, I have promised not to show the warrant to any but Robin, for whom it is intended," said the tinker in the same flat voice that told Robin Hood much about his character—that he was a faithful, honest, but unimaginative soul indeed.

"Very well," said Robin Hood good humoredly. "But let us hurry on to Nottingham lest night come before we reach Sherwood. They say 'tis a forest where one can be easily lost."

The tinker proved an excellent rider, galloping with the same steadiness that his disposition had indicated. He did not move too swiftly for safety. Neither did he move too slowly. He did everything with remarkable moderation.

But when they reached Nottingham, the tinker wished to stop at the inn to try a drink of brown ale before completing the journey, and here, to Robin Hood's astonishment, the moderate spirit of the stolid tinker ended. He drank jug after jug of foaming beer, all with deliberation and great satisfaction. And Robin, with a twinkle in his eye, motioned to the host to refill the jug as the evening wore away. Midnight came, and the tinker's head nodded. Soon he slept, soundlessly and deeply, and his purse lay upon the table unattended.

At once Robin Hood opened it and, taking the warrant for his own arrest, slipped it into his pocket and was gone from the place like a bird on the wing. When the tinker awakened, he saw that his companion from London had deserted him, and he called upon the host. "What! What is this? Is it day—or night—the next night—or the same night? I feel the strangest rocking inside my head—and my purse! Oh, mother of Heaven, my purse! There, the scoundrel! In here I had a warrant for an outlaw called Robin Hood, and it is gone. And my money has been taken too," he said bitterly.

"The warrant lies in the pocket of the man it concerneth most," smiled the host. "The fellow that dined with thee this night was none other than the bold outlaw himself, none other than Robin Hood, king of the forests, chief among merry men, lover of the Saxons, and ardent servant of the Holy Virgin. Hast thou eaten with him and known not it was he?"

"Yea, yea," moaned the tinker. "I may be slow, but I am quick to make amends. I go straightway to the forest in search of that elusive fellow."

"But first thou must pay for the ale and the beer. I'faith, I never saw two men consume as much as thou. In London thou wouldst have been thrown in the stocks for it," said the host sternly.

"But do not tell me that he did play still one more trick upon me," cried the tinker. "Marry, marry, he taketh my purse and leaveth me with this great shot to pay. I'll leave with thee my hammer and working bag for a security, and if I can but light on the knave, I'll pay thee the sum of the shot very soon. Ten shillings, thou sayest? Ah me!"

With these moanings and heavy sighings, the tinker lumbered from the little inn, leaving behind him a score of laughing townsmen who delighted in the pranks of Robin Hood when they themselves were not concerned with them.

It was dawn when the poor tinker found the parks of Sherwood. He entered them fearlessly for, as his slow deliberate manner indicated, he had not enough imagination to conjure up unseen terrors in the thickets. To him Sherwood was a dense forest with men and beasts in it. The beasts were to be shot if one met them, and the men were to be captured. So, singlehanded, he entered the wood and soon came upon a little group of fellows in Lincoln green clustered about a man somewhat older than themselves, as shown by his slightly graying hair in pleasing contrast to the healthful brown of his countenance.

"There thou art, thou scoundrel!" cried the tinker, leaping upon this handsome fellow.

Seizing an oaken staff to meet the crabtree staff of his opponent, Robin Hood fought manfully against the heavy-set tinker, but the tinker laid on his blows so fast that Robin's gay manner soon vanished. He changed from a handsome outlaw plying a staff carelessly and at ease to a hot, bruised man fighting for his very life. And then his staff cracked ominously as the tinker came down upon it heavily, and then a bruise rose on his forehead like an egg, and then he grew angry, and then he laughed. The tinker drew back in surprise, even as every man who had ever fought a combat and won did. Robin was a most amazing loser. He always laughed and clapped the victor heartily upon the shoulders.

"A boon, a boon, let me blow my horn," he cried. The tinker said him nay, but it did little good, for already the horn was raised to the outlaw's laughing mouth. The quick imperative blasts brought many men running, and those who had watched the combat jumped to their swords.

"Can we give him a beating now?" cried Little John

eagerly.

"Nay, nay, let the quarrel cease," said Robin Hood. "And bring me the coffers, Little John, for this fellow should have his reward, for he truly captured me even if he did not turn me into the hands of his scurvy King John."

The tinker said not a word, so amazed was he at the

conduct of this man whom he had sorely beaten.

"I say thee," he said, when Robin Hood had handed him the hundred pounds he had sought for by starting out after the outlaw with the King's warrant, "there is no place to spend this money in London town. Could I not, perchance, settle in Nottingham where the ale flows freely, and where I am already well acquainted with the inn's host? Perchance thou couldst tell me where to live?"

"Right here in Sherwood," they cried, for they had secretly admired his sturdy blows and always liked a newcomer.

"Become an outlaw!" the tinker said in a slightly horrified voice.

"Why not?" laughed Robin.

"Why 'tis a strange and idle life," said the tinker primly, "and my conscience would prick me indeed if I did not ply a trade."

"But we all ply a trade. Thou hast indeed sentiments after mine own heart," said Scotch Sawney.

"Arthur-a-Bland is a tanner, George o' the Green a pinder, Little John anything thou askest him to be. We are never idle. We slip into the farmers' fields at nights and hay for them so that they finish so quickly they cannot decide whether there is magic in their muscles or whether the goblins are wishing them well."

"Thou meanest ye do not just shoot all day, and play pranks, and talk by the fire all night?" said the tinker

earnestly.

"Why, we should have as sorry consciences as thou if we did such a thing," said Robin Hood. "Our outlaw band is not composed of ruffians or of lazybones. We sing the song of care-free existence, certainly, but by that we mean the greater cares of life, not the little bothering duties that we should be weary indeed without, did they not occupy our long hours of daylight. We help the poor and oppressed that they may have no cares. We plague the Normans that they may grow fearful of driving the Saxons into servitude. Shouldst thou join us, thou couldst ply thy trade in Nottingham and come to us at darkness in the long beautiful evenings when twilight comes as rosy as the dawn, when the birds sing wild unchained songs of nature, and night itself, with roaring fires and savory roasts and the long and rambling tales of other worlds and our own half-forgotten lives the other side of Sherwood."

The tinker deliberated slowly over this long speech, and then finally nodded his head and, with as much matter-of-factness in his voice as if he had but finished the terms for a bit of work, said, "Yea, it suiteth me."

They tried to celebrate for him, but he paid little attention to their songs and laughter. He ate his supper

like a methodical man, asked for the place where he might

sleep, and bade them all a grave good night.

How they laughed at him and teased Robin Hood for bringing so sturdy and solemn a fellow into a camp so fraught with fancy and so different from the staid little English towns where this fellow had always lived.

"There must be a little of the future backbone of England here," laughed Robin Hood. "Watch him and see if his manner lightens as he plays with Friar Tuck and listens to the senseless plots and plans of Midge and Will Stutely."

"Wishing thou wert in London, now?" said Little

John with mischievous eyes.

"I have never wished it. 'Twas Will Scarlet,' denied Robin Hood vigorously.

"Nay, nay," contradicted Will Scarlet, "'twas not I alone. Thou too didst look longingly at its gayety."

"Well, art thou going?" smiled Robin Hood.

"Art thou?" was the younger's answer.

For answer, Robin lay on the moss, his hands behind his head—his favorite position—and said, "Never so long as there is an open sky above my head to gaze upon."

FOR THE SAXONS

The early days of autumn passed without event other than a brief communication from Sir Guy of Gisborne to the outlaw Robin Hood, informing him that by taking Lady Fitzwalter to London he had infringed against the honor of Lord Hugh, her father.

"The scurvy rascal seemeth to consider Lord Hugh's daughter is held in bond until he can pay Sir Guy of Gisborne what he oweth," wrote Robin Hood to the Queen. And some days later a plumed messenger came riding from the royal court to Nottingham Castle bearing a letter with Her Majesty's seal for Sir Guy. It told him that his claim against Lord Hugh was in no way transferable to his daughter, Lady Marian, until the death of her father be proved. Until the return of King Richard, naught could be learned of Lord Hugh's fate, so that Sir Guy could have no possible dealings with Lady Fitzwalter until the day when the daughter learned surely of her father's death, and then could Sir Guy call only upon the maiden's loyalty to her dead father's honor, and not hold her in any way whatsoever by law.

A copy of this letter was sent to Robin Hood, and loud laughed the outlaws at this effective silencing of the wily Sir Guy. And Will Scarlet was put a little more at ease, knowing that Maid Marian could be in no better hands than those of England's powerful dowager queen, veritable ruler of the land until the return of Richard, in spite of John's schemings.

One night Robin Hood returned to camp with his head bleeding from a great bruise that might have been received from a quarterstaff. He was very silent, and though the outlaws plied him with questions as to where he had been and whence had come this cruel blow, he evaded their curious looks and crept into a corner of the glade, where he lay, gazing up at the stars, deep in thought.

"What is it? What can it be that troubleth him?"

whispered Midge to Little John.

"Perchance he is really hurt and, like the animals of the forest, has crawled off into the dark to lick his wounds and die," cried Will Stutely, his eyes as big as saucers, his imagination stirred.

"Is it that he feeleth sorely his defeat in some combat he has had?" asked Peter.

"Nay, nay," said Friar Tuck in the sharp impatient tone he used when he was most anxious about something. "That is not the way of Robin Hood. Thou knowest he cares little who winneth a physical struggle. It is the wounds of the soul and heart that concern him. His sportsmanship is like no other man's in England. He almost delighteth in defeat to see how the victor will act."

"But look at him," whined Midge, half-weeping with fear and love brought to a climax past his frail endurance.

And looking, they saw naught except that their chief seemed unaware of all about him, that the blood from his wound had formed a dark blot upon his forehead where he would not let them bathe it, and that he seemed to be living in another world entirely.

All night the outlaws went back and forth from their beds of hemlock boughs to the shadowy glade where sat their master. And all night they found no change in

him. He did not hear their questions or meet their eyes. At dawn they had all sunk into fitful, uneasy slumbers, thick with unpleasant dreams and disjointed realities, too weary to linger near him any longer. So it was with a start of terror that they awoke to hear the clear summoning blasts of Robin Hood's horn, and running toward its sound they found he had not stirred from the spot where he had first thrown himself upon the ground the night before. His face was gray with fatigue and set in strangely grim lines that made him look old and more serious than he had been for many days. But now the air of drowsiness was gone, the dreamlike state that had laid hold of him seemed to have passed, leaving him all the more alert as he faced their questioning eyes. He plunged straightway into his story, without explanation, as was his wont when time pressed and he was torn with the excitement of hunt or chase.

"Comrades, yesterday I walked in the groves of the forest, and as I drew my bow I was stopped by one of the King's rangers, who lifted his quarterstaff when I heeded him not."

There was a little stirring among them, as if a wind had blown through the grove. The outlaws clenched their hands and looked about as if in search of the ranger who had caused Robin Hood pain.

"Nay, comrades." The chief smiled a little through his grimness. "Do not think ill of the ranger. He was but a man of method, carrying forth his orders to the letter. We fought, and he beat me rather badly. My mind was more alert than my body, and I suffered his blows with a smiling heart, knowing full well he was a better man at drubbing than myself. We parted friends,

and I asked him to come with me to the greenwood. But he said that a special duty was his that day, one that would lose him his head if he disclosed it. I could see that he was eager to tell me, yet feared me, so I asked no questions and seemed to be about to depart from him.

"Coming closer, he looked at me with earnest eyes and, seeing my apparent lack of interest in the matter, he said, 'Stranger, thou shouldst join the King's guard. Odd indeed is our fated work. Employed by the King, we must needs do all we can to hurt him. Believe it or no, I am commissioned by Earl John to patrol this part of the forest this day and tomorrow, and not for the sake of guarding the red-brown deer either, I can tell thee.'

"I was more than curious as to why Earl John had put him on patrol, but I remained silent. And soon he continued, 'Thou hast heard, perchance, that the collection of a sum of money to ransom King Richard failed grievously. This, of course, is due to the fact that none of the nobles of the land gave their share, fearing lest Earl John might become king and punish them for loyalty to King Richard. So another great movement to collect enough gold to meet the ransom is abroad.' Thou canst imagine my excitement, brothers, as the fact of Richard's ransom had been occupying my thoughts ever since I left the court of London and heard the court fool sing the song of our King held prisoner in the Dark Tower. I asked the ranger if then the Normans were defying Earl John. And he answered me in a quick whisper, as if he feared the very trees listened to his words, 'Nay, 'tis not the Normans. The great Witenagemot, that Saxon Council made up of the king, his family, his bishops, and court. died with the entrance into England of a Norman King. William the Conqueror. Never since have the Saxons met in council. And now the underground rumor hath reached the ears of Earl John that somewhere along the seacoast, not far from the river Humber, a great number of Saxons are to meet in council two nights hence to find a way to ransom Richard.' I asked him, comrades, why he patrolled the forest of Sherwood, and he said that the river Trent flowed into the Humber River, and that they were watching all roadways leading to the Trent to prevent boatmen from leaving for the north.

"I left him as quickly as I could and, making my way to Nottingham, I slipped into the manor of Roger de Lacy unobserved. I found him, as he always is, lazy, charming, and careless, and very indifferent to the fate of Normans and Saxons alike. From him I learned that they suspect the new Saxon Witenagemot of being held on the seacoast near the town of Great Grimsby, a bare thirty or forty miles north. And why have I sat a long night through, brothers, in deep thought, you ask? Why have I left my wounds uncleansed, and my thoughts unvoiced? Simply this, that I have been pondering as to whether I should stay here with you, holding you together until a day when Richard needs us in battle, for the stronghold of Nottingham will hold out against Lion-Heart until it is taken by force, or whether I can trust ve to stav together even if death o'ertakes me on a journey throughout all England."

"What dost thou mean, Master?" said Little John,

intently listening to his master's words.

"Only this, Little John, that I have sung the song of the Saxons and have done little actually to make their fate happier. If they can ransom Richard they will do much for themselves. He is the only king who wants to rule an England, and not just a second Normandy. He will see the loyalty of the Saxons and make room for them at once in his judiciary ranks. And they, in turn, once they have suffered for him, worked themselves to bone and blood for him, will find a new dignity, throw off their subservience to all Normans and stand erect once more as the trees of the forest. This is something definite I can do for Richard and the Saxons both. I await only your permission and blessing, comrades, to ride this dawn to Great Grimsby by the sea."

The outlaws did not answer him at once. They did not wish to cry, "Go, go quickly, Master, if thou desirest," for they feared that his going might mean he would never return, and secretly each outlaw knew that it was Robin Hood that held the band to permanence. They would, of course, be a united whole no matter where he was on earth, awaiting his return, but should he die they would scatter like wayward thistledown once loosened by the wind, unable to hold longer to the pod. And yet they wished him to go, seeing it was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, the carrying out of a charge given him by Saint Thomas à Becket who had said, "England needs saviors and it is among the Saxons they will be found." "For England and the Saxons"-long had they heard him say it, with fervor, with passion. Now that a chance had come for him to do something more definite than his arduous work of a lifetime—the intangible cherishing of the last stock of the Saxon race—they wished him well.

"But Master, thou hast done enough," Midge persisted, still unconvinced. "Thou hast gathered us together, far more than a hundred of us who will fight for

Richard when he cometh back, and who have sworn to withstand Norman rule until we die. That is enough, Master, for one man to do."

"Midge, little lad, in the late afternoon of existence," tis not those indefinite things a man remembereth when he looketh into his own heart to see if he hath fulfilled the tasks set for himself in the early days of his life. Let me have this joy of doing something my heart hath cried to do, something that will let me take a definite journey, singing the song of the Saxons to all England, pleading with them, arousing them, and in the end, perchance, finding that Richard is free, his freedom bought for him in part by the Saxons that I have stirred to action."

With no further word Little John brought forth the fastest charger in the camp, a black gelding with a white star on his forehead. They gave Robin a suit of uncertain gray that might have belonged to any peasant in the land, and enough gold for many days they tied in a knapsack, along with food for his immediate journey.

And then words whispered in their ears by Friar Tuck brought a look of misgiving to their faces. The fat little impish friar had said that nothing would please Robin Hood more than a mass held at his departure. They had not the heart to refuse him, but they feared that his joyous bubbling nature would spoil the reverent moment of their master's departure.

But it was a new Friar Tuck that came before Robin Hood asking permission to say a mass for him. Robin Hood looked down into the round face that was usually alight with shining fun and mischief, and saw a look of dignity, a sweetness that was in perfect accord with the half tender, half sorrowing mood of goodby that the others

all felt. So to the tune of rustling leaves and the intimate twitterings of birds, a farewell mass was held for him. The high sweet voices of the youngest outlaws sounded with strange ecstasy, the deep murmur of the chants with a fervent, giving note. And as Robin stood there, the whole assembly blended into the forest glades and the song and the chant were like the words of forest trees and forest birds. The soil and these men of the soil were joined, and England and the Saxons were one.

The black charger swept past the aisles of greenwood trees until the world was only a blur of green and brown. Reaching the hills to the north, well away from the river Trent that was so closely watched by Earl John's men, Robin Hood looked back a single moment at the black crown of Sherwood Forest set against the blue morning sky, and he did not let his mind wonder how soon he would see his greenwood home again.

* * *

A long stretch of desolate beach lay south of the town of Great Grimsby. Into it cut innumerable small inlets where the water lay in frothy calmness, as if at rest after leaving the surging, restless body of the open sea. The beach indented from the little bays was more protected than the open stretches bordering the projecting coastline. Gathered round the circular shore of one of the small inlets were many men. No fire marked the spot, and the moonless, starless sky effectively hid their identity. A bird flying near would have gone swiftly on its way, for the whole effect was one of uncanny mystery—voices in the night on the loneliest beach in England, without the relief of human bodies meeting the eye.

For long the voices had spoken, some of them pitched to high-strung arguments of frenzied appeal, others the dull monotonous thud of denial.

"Why should we give what we have to ransom the King? Whose King will he be but the Normans', the Normans'," was one surging resentful cry.

"'Tis our chance to show the King we are not clods only, but have souls and feelings," cried another in swift reply.

"Let us make war while he is gone," was the sigh of some embittered heart.

"'Twould be the massacre of Christendom brought to England, the very thing the crusaders have left England to stop," was the answer.

The night wore on. The waters of the little quiet bay began to lap the shore in faint protesting interruptions, like the plea of voices begging silence to the arguments, settlement for the problem. The voices of the men were husky and thick with the passion of speech, yet they were little nearer an ending than they had been at the first shades of night. All at once a clear voice rang out in amazing sharpness as compared with the tired, pushing words that had thus far filled the silences. Its sharpness was not one of anger or impatience nor yet the imperative tone of the dictator, but rather the instrument of a clean-cut mind eager to voice its thoughts.

"Both of ye are right," the voice said with an edge of laughter in spite of the seriousness of the words, "and that is what maketh this question so difficult to decide. There are those of ye who feel that working for Richard who lieth in chains is but the unloosing of a lion who will roar at ye for thanks. Perchance ye are right, for Richard

is one who roareth, but, friends, his harsh commands are always given in the spirit of justice. Should he roar at ve. 'twould be because he thought roaring would be all that would impress ve. Ye have never risen to dignity before, but have always been willing to wear the Norman voke. And those of ye who say that we should give the gold we have to ransom Richard seem likewise to be right. 'Since his own people will not rise to help him,' ye say, 'why cannot we, and perchance be rewarded upon his return?' And ye are wrong only in that ye consider there is a difference between Richard's own people and vourselves. 'Tis ve as much as any Norman lord that make the difference between Norman and Saxon, since ve look upon yourselves as different. Richard wishes you all to belong to England, and not until ye lift your heads high and call yourselves English shall the Normans look upon ye other than as vanquished Saxons lingering on in a captured land."

A murmur of resentment seemed to rise like the distant rumbling of thunder, but it dropped to silence—a silence alive with eagerness for what might come next.

"A century ago when the Witenagemot was called—that great Saxon Council that we have tried to recapture again this night—men laid the plans of a nation, dismissed kings, levied taxes, collected money for particular purposes, decided upon war, planned elections. Shall ye turn this Witenagemot tonight, held on the lonely beach, into a failure? Shall there be no echo of the past, of past strength of Saxon forefathers, of past history that can be remade only by fresh exercise of that strength? Decree, all ye Saxons, that a messenger shall go throughout every shire and hamlet in England, collecting from

all who are Saxon a ransom for Richard, who is as much our king as he is the king of any proud and selfish Norman. Decree it in a loud cry that shall be more than an echo of those Saxon voices of long ago, in a voice that shall not be a mere copy of the old Witenagemot, but one that shall be called a new voice of a new council called English," cried the man in the darkness.

"Who can go to every hamlet and shire in England?" was a sullen reply. "There is work to do, fields to be tilled, food for the winter laid in for our cattle. And who knoweth how to convince the Saxons that they can be reborn into something thou hast called English, and why should they care to be called by this new name?"

"Only that Saxondom can never come back, and that Normandy should never be let in," was the answer, "and that men should be brothers instead of master and serf. Let them, then, bring this transformation about. And to give it recognition in all eyes, let men forget the past and build a future upon the word 'England.' And who will go for ve throughout each hamlet and shire? I will go. And though many months pass, I swear to thee that all England shall know what ye Saxons have decreed in the Witenagemot held by the sea. And that ye may trust me, no money will I collect myself, but in each town I will call such a meeting as this and some Saxon well known to his fellowmen will gather the gifts of his townsfolk and take them to the Bishop of Rouen, a man good and true, who will see that the money goeth where we have decreed, toward the ransoming of Lion-Heart."

"And how shall we know that thou hast carried out thy promise, and hast not tired of thy task before 'tis half done?" said one more skeptical than the rest. "Thou shalt know by my name that circles the world, like Puck, in scarce a score of minutes. And even as I have left my mark in this great land before, I shall continue to do so. Thou hast heard perchance of 'Robin Hood's Bay' at Scarborough. There will be other landmarks bearing the name of Robin Hood as he goeth on his quest for Richard's ransom."

"Robin Hood! Robin Hood!" they cried, and they seized one another and searched each familiar face in the gloom, trying to find the mysterious hero of the Saxons, but they found him not, for he had slipped from the beach to the woods behind and, mounting a black charger,

galloped away on his ride for the King.

When day broke, the townsmen of Great Grimsby searched the sand to see if he had left aught behind him, and near the water's edge, pinned securely to the earth, was an upright arrow that could belong to none but Robin Hood.

"He hath marked his word by this token," said an old Saxon, taking the arrow from the sand.

"I should have liked to go with him," sighed another.

"Will he hold councils for the Saxons all over the land?" questioned a boy eagerly.

"Councils for the English," corrected the old Saxon gravely, as if determined to learn the lesson that Robin Hood had taught, though he had been a Saxon for nearly eighty years. And as they retraced their steps to Great Grimsby, their hearts beat proudly for the man of their own race who had so great a heart that he had seen what they could do to regain their long-lost dignity. And the old Saxon carefully preserved the arrow of Robin Hood, showing it to those children who came to his door,

reading to them the lesson of Robin Hood engraved in his old heart.

When the sun came up, the black charger had already traveled a goodly number of miles across country toward Halifax, a town not far from Doncaster, where Robin Hood thought to hold the next council. He lost somewhat the serious feeling that had dominated him on his journey to Great Grimsby. It was an exhilarating. exciting task he had set upon, this stirring of others' hearts, this whipping of minds into new lovalties. He found himself wishing that he could tell Maid Marian about it. How would she look at him? With pride and admiration in her dark eyes? With that soft childlike worship he had seen when she told him he had long been the hero of her dreams? It was just at that moment that he heard the deep, full chiming of a bell. His reverie ended sharply. He was at the instant riding through a dark forest similar to Sherwood. His charger stopped as if he had come home. A strange sunlit ray blinded his eyes suddenly where two dark pines parted to let in the light, and in the center of its radiance he seemed to see the Virgin's face. Her calm eves regarded him gravely, far more gravely, he remembered thinking, than ever before. Her curving mouth drooped a little sadly, so that he could not find her elusive smile, and a voice spoke very clearly to him, but whether the voice spoke to his ears in living tones or spoke only to his heart in a dream he was never to know:

"Robin, long ago thy pledge to me was to make life a joyous thing, to cause not death or sadness of any kind, and to uplift thy Saxon race. A new pledge I ask of thee. Think not upon worldly affairs. Deny thyself, even as a monk who burieth himself in a cell. Carry my image alone in thy heart until thy death, and thy quest through England shall be filled with glory."

And then he was back again in a bit of dark forest, alone with the charger. He passed a hand across his bewildered eyes, looked backward and saw that the streak of sunlight was gone, that no spot of radiant light lit the little glade. Had she come to him? Had he dreamed it, or had his lonely heart called her to him? Must he forget the child, Maid Marian, who worshiped him so gently? And pondering upon the whole mystery of that sunlit moment, he saw that his love for Lady Fitzwalter was indeed a little thing compared with his love for the sacred Lady Mary that he had grown accustomed to and carried throughout a lifetime. And he knew that Maid Marian would find him a great disappointment, even as her father, in spite of all his goodness, was a disappointment. For there was that compelling thing in his devotion to his God that Robin Hood had found in his devotion to his Lady, which sometimes cut him off from all earthly things, so that living women in this time of deep religious fervor might often feel that there were moments when they could not reach the hearts of men. He saw that it would be indeed a great wrong to be to Lady Marian. as her father had been, a kindly dreamlike figure, sometimes a laughing comrade and then again a being half alive. And he whispered his pledge to the Virgin that she would be the only image his heart would ever hold, even as he had whispered a vow to her when he was a mere stripling. The first pledge to her had patterned his life of normal happiness and goodness, and this vow to her was to mean that he would carry out his quest for the Saxons with glory and honor, and so would become to them as Peter the Hermit became to the crusaders, a pilgrim of his people, a courageous, single-purposed man who gave up his life for a national ideal. He would have smiled if he could have known that years later the peasants of England held a Robin Hood's Day with their other Saints' Days, for in his heart he never thought of himself as other than the young boy of Canterbury dreaming dreams for England and the young man at Chartres finding peace in the spirit of the Virgin.

RESCUING THE THREE SQUIRES WHILE BEARING THE NEWS

The black gelding had reared its impatient head for the hundredth time in the last hour. Robin Hood knew that the horse longed to rest. All day they had traveled, and rider and horse were both eager to reach their goal. It was some distance this side of Halifax that Robin Hood saw a possible resting place for the night and, fearing to find none better in the town itself, drew up his horse in the thicket of trees at the bottom of a sheltering hill. It was not yet dusk and many people passed along the road, turning to look curiously at the lone black charger and the man who lay on the soft grass beneath the trees. Robin heeded none of them as he lay there, his mind busy with thoughts of how to gather together the Saxons of Halifax and how, once they were gathered, to impress their minds and hearts with the rightness of the thing he had come to tell them. There seemed to be an unvielding prejudice everywhere against any form of taxation, so that to gather the ransom for Richard as if it were the levying of a tax could not be considered. The whole matter should come on the crest of a wave of excitement. in an atmosphere of beauty, of mystery, that would impress their stoical feelings and carry them beyond their little confined world.

Idly he heard the distant thud of horses' hoofs, but still he stirred not, for there had been a score of horsemen passing along the road all through the late afternoon. Still there was something imperative about this galloping messenger. Robin lifted himself to rest on his elbow and caught his breath in dismay at what he saw. A plumed page mounted on a white horse was galloping down a steep incline at a reckless and foolhardy pace. Ah, even as he looked, what he expected happened. The white horse went to its knees, and its rider, flying headlong over into the dust, lay in a crumpled heap. Robin reached him in a second, and saw that the page was a young Norman with a pale, haughty countenance now twisted into a mask of grim endurance.

A little while later the young Norman opened his great dark eyes to a world less confused by pain and dizziness. A pleasant coolness above his eyes made him lift a weak hand to find that a cloth soaked well with cold water lay across his brow. Even as he was conscious that his throat was parched and dry, his head was lifted by a gentle hand and a trickle of warm sweet wine poured down his throat, turning his sensations to a pleasant glow. He looked into the eyes of a man of middle years with merry, deep eyes and a brown face tanned by the suns and winds of an out-of-door existence.

"A sorry tumble, indeed! I fear me 'twill be another nightfall before thou canst ride the white horse again."

"Nay, but 'tis impossible to wait!" The young Norman started to rise, but fell back groaning.

"Or impossible not to. Which is it?" smiled the older man, taking the wet cloth, warm from the boy's burning brow, over to a little trickling stream of water that bubbled out of the rocks of the hill.

"But 'tis a message from Earl John himself to be delivered this very night, that they may be hanged at dawn! He will kill me instead if I do not reach Halifax before the moon goeth down," cried the boy in a frenzy of excitement.

"Tell it to me all and quietly," advised Robin Hood, "and perchance I can help thee."

And the Norman page poured forth his story, half sobbing with weakness and fear.

"Three young squires of Halifax have been trying to incite the Saxons to rebel against their Norman lords, so that Earl John hath rightly declared they shall die at dawn tomorrow. The sheriff of the town had already decreed it, but because of their great popularity in the town, the plea was sent to Earl John to revoke the sentence."

"It was not revoked?" said Robin, in a strange voice that might indicate any one of many things—a hope that the young Saxon squires should not escape, a vast unconcern for the whole affair, or a mere humoring of his patient.

"Nay, 'twas not revoked. Earl John hath written a message to the people of Halifax couched in such long terms I can hardly read it."

"And why shouldst thou bother to read it, if thou knowest what it contains?" said Robin Hood.

"Faith, that is another reason why I must go myself to Halifax. The chief magistrate of the little town cannot read, so it behooves me to reach the place where the gallows stand at dawn, so the people can raise no cry of protest. A document from Earl John is the only thing that will silence them."

"Well, try again to rise," said Robin, as if he desired naught more than the speedy recovery of the sufferer.

But the Norman of course could not rise alone, and Robin did not offer to aid him. Instead he surveyed him with a somewhat stupid expression that was a better disguise than any costume he could have worn, saying, "Mine uncle died from rising too soon after being thrown from his mare."

"What! Thou speakest of death!" cried the page, shrinking from the thought of it, as do all young men, who are vastly satisfied with life as it is.

"Well, I only told thee of mine uncle. He had a fall not quite so bad as thine own. 'Twas the getting to his feet while he was still too dizzy that did it, perchance."

"But what can I do?" moaned the page, holding his aching head. "Either way meaneth death for me, since Earl John is certain to suspect me of treachery if I do not bring the message to the sheriff of Halifax by dawn of tomorrow."

"Why can't I take it for thee?" said Robin, in the same stupid, matter-of-fact manner he had used throughout the whole conversation.

"Canst thou read?" cried the page eagerly.

"For certain I can read, though a little slowly," said Robin Hood. "Give me the document and I will show thee."

So the Norman page brought forth the parchment stamped with the seal of the Earl of Mortain, and handed it to his rescuer with a look in his eyes made up of hope and fear lest this man disappoint him and send him to his doom.

Then Robin Hood spelled out the words to himself slowly, as if he were not at all used to seeing a written

order, and after a little he cleared his throat and read in a high, stilted voice:

"John, Earl of Mortain, to all his men and friends, French and English, present and to come, greeting! Know ye that I have declined to revoke the sentence put upon Ivan Brito, Robert Torkard, and Henry Kitte by the sheriff of Halifax, and that I condemn them to death by the gallows. I have confirmed my wish by the evidence of the present writing and by the protection of my seal. These being witnesses: Hugh, Bishop of Coventry; Adam, Abbott of Elbeck; Alexander, Prior of Lenton; Roger de Play; Gerard de Camville; Henry de Vere; Serlo the clerk, and many others."

"Yea, thou hast read it aright," said the page weakly. "Now listen. Go to the sheriff of the town and present this to him, and he will ride with thee to the spot where the gallows stand on the lonely heaths the other side of the village. He will, perchance, ask thee to read this document, so stay ever near him should he call upon thee. 'Tis a most serious offense the squires have committed, for there is no room for Saxons left except to be Normans' slaves; and better a dead Saxon than a rebellious one. And as these three be rebellious, better they all be dead. Dost thou understand?"

"Yea, yea," said Robin Hood meekly. "Better they be dead than rebellious, so as they be rebellious this telleth them they shall be dead."

"Thou art a good fellow, even if thou dost repeat like a magpie. Perchance 'tis the best way to be," sighed the Norman. Then he sank weakly back upon the moss and closed his eyes willingly. He had taken the lesser way to death, he felt, since this practical fellow had told him he might surely die if he arose so soon after his fall. Half comforted, he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Robin Hood wafted him a kiss from his long fingertips, put the document into his jerkin, and went to the spot where the black gelding stood, motionless and at rest.

"I be indeed sorry, Blackcoat," whispered Robin, running his hand over the silky horse, "but 'tis best that we have three rebellious Saxons instead of three dead ones, dost thou not think, my bonny?" And he chuckled to himself as he thought that the young Norman page would have considered his magpie was most woefully twisted if he had heard him now.

It was past midnight when Robin Hood reached the outskirts of the little town. A few lights gleamed in the high windows beneath gabled roofs and penthouses. They shone forth impudently like images of stars. Robin Hood knocked loudly upon the door of a modest little cottage huddled down nearer the ground than the others, which gave it an appearance of a tiny hunch-backed figure, shy of its impressive neighbors.

The door was opened so quickly it seemed as if whoever was inside had been waiting for some guest to knock. Robin Hood, blinded a moment by a lighted taper, lifted the page's plumed hat from his head, snatched at the moment of his departure from the injured man to give him some show of authority should he need it. When he lifted his head from his sweeping bow, he knew not what he should see, but certainly could not have been more surprised than at the sight of a little old woman, fully dressed, her face puckered into a pitiful mask of weeping.

"What news hast thou brought?" she asked, with an odd little catch in her thin voice.

"What news thyself, dame?" he said cheerfully and

with a mystified air.

With that she burst into low, continuous weeping that was the saddest thing Robin had ever heard. It was unreal and very compelling in its very effortless attempt to arouse him. He knew only that here indeed was grief, the keening of an old heart without the strength to cry with passion. At last, with an odd gesture of dignity, she opened her door wider and motioned him into a small, neat room with the customary furnishings of cottages of its kind—a great bed, a stiff-backed chair, a spinning-wheel, a fireplace with a graceful settle on either side.

"Then thou dost not know that three squires of Halifax are condemned to die this dawn, and that one is mine only son?" she said wearily. "I have waited up all the night long for word from Earl John. Perchance," and her face lighted, "he will send his pardon to them at dawn and they need not die. I told him, my Henry, 'twould do little good to try to be a brave man and tell his townsfolk 'twas time the Saxons looked to their rights. 'Twas a foolish thing to do, indeed, when he had become a squire through his cleverness and could have lived the rest of his days in peace."

"I bear a message for thy son," smiled Robin Hood kindly, "but 'tis not to be disclosed until the dawn. Let me lie upon thy hearthstone and sleep and warm myself. Waken me before the light. And in the meantime sit thee here by the window, good dame, and look at the stars and pray. And when the stars go out," he added teasingly, "light thy tapers that look like stars and devoutly cross thyself and feel like God."

She did not even ask him what he meant by his laughing chatter. She only knew that a faint ray of hope for her son had been offered by this stranger, though he had told her nothing definite she could count upon.

Before the sky was light in the east, she touched him gently with her worn hand and saw him awaken, his eyes dark with sleep and a look upon him as if he had been in a far country of dreams. He smiled at her and, rising, went to her table and ate the simple repast she had made for him, the while she watched him eagerly to see that he had all he wished.

"Farewell, good dame, I go to the house of the sheriff, who will lead me to the site of the gallows. Go thou straightway to that spot and let all thy Saxon friends in Halifax come also to hear the tidings I bear."

She directed him where to go, and he followed the winding street and entered the gateway of the most dignified mansion in the town, overbearing as its owner, its tower higher than the other gabled roofs, like a long and skinny neck of some proud and haughty Norman trying to hold his head high above his fellowmen. The other houses stood in sad, untidy rows in the presence of this manor of great show. Robin Hood gained admittance straightway when he doffed his plumed hat and showed the sheriff's servant a corner of the flaming seal of Earl John.

"You bring the news we wish," said a tall, heavy-set man with snow-white hair to Robin Hood.

"I bear always such news," laughed Robin Hood.

"Very well then, let us go at once to the gallows. The hangman awaits permission to swing his three men, and permission, I take it, lies in the paper thou bearest."

Robin Hood did not answer this question but continued his merry noddings to the sheriff's men, and laughed and smiled in a manner of good fellowship, as if he too could scarce wait until they reached the spot on the heath where the gallows awaited three good Saxons.

They rode in the fresh morning air, leaving Halifax when it was still gray dawn and watching the sky slowly redden and blaze as the sun rose. The highway was filled with sullen-faced peasants who in their concern for the three brave heroes of their race had slept little all the night before.

At last they neared the valley surrounded by high, forbidding hills that shut out the curious eyes of other shires of England. The gallows stood like mournful stunted trees with ugly trunks and clipped foliage, crudely made by the hands of men for the sake of what men call justice. Robin Hood shivered a little at the sight. The orange sky beyond those silhouetted stakes of wood seemed a strange, bloodstained curtain of a fearful stage. The valley was filled with Saxons, drably clothed in the dull browns and grays of their trades. But their golden hair gleamed in the morning light, and thus marked, their figures stood forth more clearly than those of their Norman fellows, whose swarthy skins and dark hair tended to confuse them into a blurred mass.

Robin Hood followed the white-haired sheriff to the rude platform erected for the magistrates and sat down upon the wooden bench next to the highest officials of Halifax. Idly letting his gaze sweep the crowd, he saw, straining toward the front, the little old woman who had opened her door to him the night before, the mother of Henry Kitte, condemned to death.

The three squires were brought forward, a little pale but standing proudly erect, with slim, straight bodies, golden hair, and eyes undimmed by tears. Their mouths alone were set into grim lines in the place of their usual boyish smiles. They looked at no one, and with an unsuccessful attempt at careless ease fastened their eyes upon the sheriff to see at this last hour what their fate was to be.

The tall man rose and came forward. He brushed back his snowy hair with an affected gesture. He smiled a little, and Robin Hood saw that it was the bland, conscious smile of one who is about to inflict cruelty and who enjoys his own power.

"These young men have been condemned to death by myself and the other judiciaries of Halifax for their unwise sayings regarding their Norman superiors. A messenger from Earl John bears the document that we shall now read to you." He stretched a careless hand out toward Robin, who, with a feeling that he ran a great risk, gave him the precious parchment. What if the Norman page had been wrong and the sheriff could read, after all? But with the same affected gesture, brushing back his waving snow-white hair, the sheriff said, "Read it, my good man. Thou hast carried it all this way."

A low titter went through the crowd, for they knew full well why the sheriff had told the messenger to read the document. Who in the town knew not the other townsmen's faults and foibles? Who did not know that the sheriff of Halifax had never been able to read the simplest writings? But the laughter died, and the silence was the more ominous because of the grotesque outbreak

of humor in this scene of tragedy. They waited, looking with brooding eyes on Robin Hood as he put down his plumed hat and strode to the front of the little platform. He unrolled the parchment, and the onlookers strained and peered over one another's shoulders to see if they could see the great flaming seal of the man who called himself the new king of England, John, Earl of Mortain. It glowed like a tiny spot of blood on the white of the parchment. It made their hearts cringe as they waited to hear what the words would be.

John, Earl of Mortain, to all his men and friends, French and English, present and to come, greeting! Know ye that I have decided to revoke the sentence put upon Ivan Brito, Robert Torkard, and Henry Kitte by the sheriff of Halifax, saying they shall not be condemned to death by the gallows nor by any other way, but are to be set free without hazard to their bodies and without blame. I have confirmed my wish by the evidence of the present writing and by the protection of my seal—

Robin Hood's voice was drowned in a long sobbing cry of relief. He turned to see the sheriff on his feet, fists clenched, his dark eyes drawn together so that his brows met in a fierce straight line. The Norman nobles of the little town looked to their magistrate to see what they should do. They were more than ready to quell this Saxon outburst, yet the strange and unexpected words of the Earl of Mortain had terrified them not a little. They looked at the messenger of the King, but could see only a straightforward man of some years with a calm and reflective gaze staring back at them. Suddenly this messenger stirred himself to further action and, lifting his hand, called for silence. The utter stillness sank upon the crowd once more, for even yet they suspected a trick and could scarcely believe that Earl

John had really shown such unexpected grace to the three Saxon squires.

"These Saxon men are freed from death because Earl John fears to do other than King Richard would do should he have been called upon for this decision. It is King Richard that has your thanks, not his brother, who is merely carrying out the policies of the King."

What was this? The Norman lords looked at each other too terrified to move. Had Earl John turned against them, and was he really not his brother's enemy at all? No one knew what to believe, so they listened on unwillingly, woodenly, to the thrilling words of this calm stranger.

"Now has come a day for gratitude. You cannot go through the world forever receiving, brethren, and not giving. It soon meaneth the end of receiving, so the giving is really for your own future benefit."

Even the most stupid among them could see the sense in that. This stranger had a good and safe doctrine, building up one's future luck by not taking too much of the present without return. They listened even more keenly.

"When King Richard returneth, all ye Saxons, 'twill be like this forever—a Saxon squire judged wisely and well, as he is a subject of the King. But until the King's return there needs must be a vast uncertainty about the matter. Suppose, perchance, that John doth not always read Richard's mind rightly. The King is in far-away Austria, a prisoner in a Dark Tower. All the good thoughts he holdeth for ye may never come to light, should he stay there in the shadows. He needeth a ransom. And now 'tis your turn to give. Saxons, all

ye Saxons who long for a day of justice such as ye have seen today, give of your gold to Richard."

And somehow no one dared to question the right of the stranger to speak. The Normans dared not lift a hand, lest he truly be giving a message from Earl John. The sheriff dared not call upon him for the document, for he could not read, and perchance the words were really there. Besides, there was that about this stalwart figure—something in the clear straight gaze of the man who spoke to them, that hypnotized them into silence. And the Saxons felt a stirring of loyalty for Richard across the sea in chains, Richard who, no matter how rough and brutal, had never been known to be aught but just.

"Appoint ye at once a Saxon messenger to send to the Bishop of Rouen, who shall bear your gifts for

Richard's ransom."

"And how do we know that thou art not taking the money for thine own self?" cried a little wizened-up man.

"Ye know, brethren, because I leave ye at once. Never shall I see you again, perchance, for 'tis an out of the way place ye have here. It might well be round about Robin Hood's barn."

They thought that he used a strange saying. Only those who came from the center of Nottingham had come to employ that expression, meaning by Robin Hood's barn the camp in Sherwood, a long way round indeed for travelers to go, but far safer to take that long journey than to dare to go crossway through the forest.

"Do ye pledge by your God in heaven to give to Richard even as he hath given to you?" said Robin Hood.

"Aye, aye," they cried. And a slim Saxon youth came forth to kneel at Robin Hood's feet and to say with

quiet dignity, "My people have chosen me to gather the gifts and carry them to London."

Robin Hood smiled upon him. "Arise, arise, lad. There shall be no more kneeling and bowing in England save to His Majesty himself. The Saxon squires were spared, for their cause was a noble cause, the ending of kneeling and bowing, of master and serf, of Norman and Saxon. Let there be a new people called English who walk proudly and who hold their heads high, and let this be a new land when Richard comes home. Welcome him to England, not to lesser Normandy."

With a light jump Robin Hood was off the platform, mounted upon the black gelding, and already halfway up the hillside. They watched him speed from them, wondering a little at his agile horse, his marvelous holding of a straight position in the face of the steep cliffs. They saw him ride to the very top, and, outlined against the sky, the figure in black lifted a bow into the air. Arrows sped to earth—magic arrows that lit at the feet of the sheriff, the fat magistrates, and at last at the very top of the gallows themselves.

"There is only one man in England can shoot like that," cried Henry Kitte. "'Tis Robin Hood!"

"Robin Hood! Robin Hood!" the cry soared in a score of different keys—expressing terror, and anger, and a swelling burst of praise.

And as the horseman galloped out of sight, an avalanche of great stones rolled down the hillside, loosened after ages of standing. Straight toward the gallows they rolled, and so great was their force that the upright stakes that looked like ugly trees splintered and cracked and fell useless to the ground.

"Mother of God!" the sheriff cried, running in terror from this witchery.

"He hath pitched these rocks of the great hill for his amusement, rocks that only a supernatural strength could move, and he hath used the gallows for his target," cried the Saxon youth chosen by his people to go to London with gifts for the King's ransom.

"A pixy he must be," sighed an old woman, "pitching

half a hillside for his pennystones."

They went back to Halifax town filled with the wonder of what they had seen, and word spread, traveling by peddlers, by messengers, and by all manner of men who pass along the highway, that Robin Hood had performed a miracle for them to make them hold to their promises they had made him. And a little band of men in Great Grimsby looked at one another in wonder, for they had only half dreamed that the promises of the night by the sea could come true. Robin Hood had kept his word. He was pursuing his quest and letting those men of the new Witenagemot hear of his quest by engraving his name in men's minds with the aid of his magic deeds.

They went to Halifax to see the pixy stones, and already small urchins of the town were crying, "A shilling if we lead the way to the Robin Hood pennystone." And the gallows were pointed out lying in splinters, and the arrows, pinned neatly about the chairs of the sheriff and his men.

And Robin Hood rode on, his blood hot with the excitement of his quest—east, west, north, or south. Which way? Which way? He let the black gelding find the trail.

Book the eighth



THE PASSING OF OLD FRIENDS THE IMMORTAL ROBIN HOOD

Like a rushing wind sweeping all England from Land's End, that furthermost projection of Cornwall, to the north of Cumberland, traveled horse and rider. And word of this phantom Robin Hood who passed like a shadow before the sun was first only the gentle chattering of a little murmuring stream, and then the insistent roar of a great torrent.

Until now Robin Hood's name had been to England a wonder of the moment—a half twist of reverence and irreverence. It was this voyage of the night through every shire and hamlet, along the coasts, through the whole of his beloved England on an errand as noble as any that has ever animated a great cause, that gave to Robin Hood that epic touch of the immortal.

There arose fabulous tales of the feats of the yeoman and his charger. Gossip rang with the impassable mountains he had crossed, the wild streams he had forded. And wherever he had been, his name was connected with the natural phenomena of the spot. A chasm at Chatsworth was called Robin Hood's Leap—thirty feet from side to side, and bottomless depths. The villagers told of a moonless night, and how the black charger carried its rider across; how the yeoman stirred not in his seat, but sat sternly erect and at ease. Following his course, capping the peaks he climbed, the magic

of his name crowned England—Robin Hood's target, pricks, and butts were the cairns on Blackdown in Somersetshire, the barrows near Whitby in Yorkshire and near Ludlow in Shropshire; Robin Hood's hills in Gloucestershire and in Derbyshire; a great rock near Matlock was Robin Hood's Tor; a boundary stone in Lincolnshire was called Robin Hood's cross; a cave in Nottinghamshire, his stable; a rude natural rock in Hope Dale, his chair; Blackstone Edge in Lancashire, his bed; and high rocks near Haddon in Derbyshire, his stride.

So he went, in the cold of winter, in the long wet spring, striding as if in seven league boots and riding the splendid black gelding.

And now the credulous minds of men were caught with the ardor of this Saxon's words. They imbued his spirit with that of ancient heroes, crying his praise to God, a reincarnated Alexander the Great riding his horse Bucephalus, the Cid of a century before in Spain, that wild elusive warrior who fought against the Moors, a saint-like hero buried with his faithful black charger, Babieca.

They thought that martyred saints spoke through the temple of his body—Saint Thomas à Becket begging the Normans to receive the Saxons as one of them. They said that the Virgin watched over him, for had he not sworn to live apart from worldly things for her?

And only those in Sherwood Forest knew that Robin Hood was a man and not a god, human instead of a phantom immortal. And they alone knew that the rider of the night through shire and hamlet, in cold and wet, suffered the physical woes of man.

"He will die!" Midge cried passionately as they gathered about the roaring fire in the caves of the Popish Hills.

"Where is he tonight?" sighed Will Scarlet.

"But he is carrying forth his errand mightily," said Little John proudly. "Even today the Bishop of Rouen hath enough gold in his keeping to ransom Lion-Heart."

"Then why doth he not do so? And why doth not Richard come home so that Robin can return to us

again?" cried Midge.

And Little John had not the heart to tell them that it might be many months still before King Richard saw English soil again, for officers of the emperor of Austria would have to come to London to test the quality of the gold. Then it would have to be taken to Germany to be divided, and always the King's rescue depended upon the outcome of the conspiracies of the king of France and Earl John, depended upon their success in holding him prisoner until John had taken the throne and all its nobles into his powerful hands.

It was not until the coming of the pale golden days of early summer, when the outlaws played half-heartedly in the greenwood that Robin Hood returned.

Into the half gloom of the thickets he rode down from the north of Sherwood toward Nottingham. Turning away from the secret crossroad that led to the outlaw camp, he went on to Nottingham, thinking to learn a little of his merry men from the loose lips of those town drinkers and gossips that gathered about the Blue Boar Inn in the long afternoons. They would know him not. Who indeed could know this man of gray dust? The gray of the roads and the mists of England had covered

his clothes, his shoes, his face. More gaunt than a lonely hermit starving himself in his little cell for love of Mary, was Robin Hood. And his glowing hair was a little duller than before, his mouth a thinner and straighter line. Robin Hood had not been untouched by his errand of loyalty for Richard.

But the talk over the cups was hard for him to listen to for any length of time. To hear through the long discussion of the cruelty of bear-baiting wearied him. All that these babblers discussed never changed, so why did they bother to speak of it again! "'Tis said there are 108,000 souls in London town." "Are there to be sea-fights on the river Thames at the Easter holidays?" "And what may they be?" "Why, thou knowest, surely, a pole is put in the middle of the river—'tis the target—"

He could bear it no longer. Rising, he paid his scot and turned to leave.

"Join with us, stranger," one of the old men said politely.

"Nay, I thank thee," said Robin Hood, "but I seek the road to Doncaster."

"Straightway north, but beware thou of the woods called Sherwood."

"Why, methought 'twas a safe place now that the rogue Robin Hood hath turned to other spots in England," said the outlaw.

"Aye, he hath, indeed, but all of his troop have stayed here awaiting his return, and it seemeth almost as if he came back to them at night and told them what to do by day, for they play the same pranks their Robin himself was wont to do." "But I thought they had all scattered," professed Robin, seemingly greatly astonished.

"Scattered, humph!" the innkeeper said with blazing eyes.

"Twas just last week that Little John disguised himself as a beggar and with a most pious air relieved us of our gold. And what is more, he was not even a beggar loyal to beggars, for he chased all the vagabonds of Nottingham who got in the way of his begging. And wouldst thou believe it, now? Old Timothy hath no more a crippled leg than thou or I. He ran at the sight of Little John as fast as any Robin Hood might travel. And fat Simon hath all his sight, for when Little John seized his purse, he knew in which pocket to poke for it. Aye, that Little John showed up all the beggars in the trade."

"But was not that kind of him?" said Robin Hood with a twinkle in his tired eyes.

"Nay," said the old innkeeper petulantly. "If we've been fools these many years and given the crippled and blind a penny, at least we have had a warm feeling that we were giving a little charity. And now we've been fools, we discover, to those who needed not charity. 'Tis not a nice feeling, stranger, at all."

"Did the outlaws stay in the greenwood all the winter through?" asked the stranger.

"Nay, they climb you sandstone hills and bury themselves in the caves. Oftentimes we see their lights, like winter fireflies, peering out of the dark. 'Tis not a comfortable place to be, near the Popish Hills, in the crisp weather. The outlaws are tired of sitting by the fires with naught to do, and any villager from Nottingham who strayeth near them is almost sure to be kidnapped for a while and teased for the amusement of the merry men."

"Why is it that none can capture them?" said Robin Hood. "I should think that the King would send an army to uproot them."

"Ha, but King John did, scarce a month ago," said

the innkeeper grimly.

"What happened?" asked the stranger quietly. But had any watched him closely they would have seen that his hand shook a little as he lifted his cup.

"A valiant old knight, Sir William, was promised by John the return of his lands forfeited by his failure to pay his debts, should he be able to mow down the outlaw band while Robin Hood was away."

"A cowardly attack!" cried Robin Hood.

"Yea, so it may seem to thee, stranger, but an attack with Robin Hood present would mean certain failure. And as it came to pass, this attack without Robin Hood was worse than failure."

"What meanest thou?" said Robin Hood sharply.

"That Sir William and his men were those who were mowed down, stranger, but in such a fashion that they could not even hide their defeat in honorable death. Robin Hood doth not kill, nor do his comrades. But Sir William and his men, who thought they had crept into the forest unobserved, were suddenly pelted from on high by a shower of acorns. It soundeth foolish, stranger, but hast thou ever been hit by one of those little brown pellets? Sir William cried out 'I am dead,' and all he had was an acorn upon his nose. So it went, and they all fled from the forest. How King John

taunted them! But we have noticed he has not sent another army into Sherwood."

"Well," said Robin Hood, "I shall travel on the edges of the great forest, if so murderous a band lurk within. Fancy! I might be attacked by a whole tempest of acorns!"

They all laughed loudly and good-naturedly as they bade him farewell, but no sooner had he ridden out of sight than they were saying wisely to one another, "Well, he may joke over it, but to my way of thinking 'twould be better not ever to reach Doncaster than to reach it through Sherwood."

And now Robin Hood spurred his charger on. He had learned what he had wished to learn. His band held still that steadfast loyal integrity he had left behind him. They had lived their lives as he had wished them to, and had followed the rules he had made that they should slay no man e'en though he had attacked them with weapons to slay.

For the first time in many months his heart sang. The first glorious days of his summoning the Saxons to loyalty had been fraught with an undercurrent of danger, of misgiving that he might not succeed. And that uncertainty had been a spur to his heart, plunging him along without regard to pain or fatigue. But after that had come long monotonous weeks of travel into those little shires of England where naught penetrated save distrust and unhappiness. His impassioned pleas had fallen on dead ears. He had been forced to slave, to appeal, to fight, to call upon the saints, to make them hear. He had given his life blood, his strength and soul and heart, to the stolid and unbelieving serfs, beaten down into

mere animals, forgetful of the word "Saxon" and all that it had meant to their forefathers. And from some he had come away so emptied of strength and emotion that he had wept with weakness. From others he had gone burning with the fever of anger that they listened not to him.

And now that he was nearly there, now that 'twas but round yon curve, up a hill and a hill, down the steep cliff into the Vale of Peace itself, it seemed as if he could not wait. His heart beat intolerably, painfully. His breath came in quivering gasps like a child's long sobbing. They would not be there. Perchance they had not waited for his return. He quieted his thoughts and, pulling forth his horn, blew three short imperative blasts. Following the call was a silence like a caught breath, pregnant with cries not yet born. His charger stumbled in its eagerness to get home. The world turned terribly, and Robin heard in his aching heart the frightened scream of the dying horse mingling with the loving cries of welcome.

He opened his eyes with a feeling of deep content. His body felt apart from the rest of him—a sodden, worthless body, too weary for his burning, eager mind. He looked into the eyes of so many of them he could not think of them as separate beings. They were all his, beautifully his, still. He said their names idly, in a murmur of love, "Little John, Midge, Friar Tuck, Will Scarlet, Will Stutely, Peter Clifton," and saw them turn their heads away that he might not know they wept.

He lifted himself suddenly and crept to the silent figure of the great black charger lying beside the little gray lake. "Ah, my beauty, my bonny Blackcoat," they heard him say. "I do not weep for thee. Thy mission is done. The phantom horse that carried the phantom Robin Hood into the bone and blood of England is needed no longer. Sleep, as my body longs to sleep."

"Master, thou dost not wish to die?" it was Midge's voice that broke Robin Hood's reverie. From the delirium of his fatigue and emotion the piercing, terror-stricken voice of the boy brought him back to his sane

and normal world again.

"Nay, little Midge, I do not want to die, but I have a host of ye to make me forget my weariness. The good charger had naught to welcome him but the sweet smell of home, and his eagerness to seek that small glory killed him. I fear to let ye all know how great my eagerness to seek out each one of ye and hear the long story of my absence."

"I have aged, Master, and have lost all but the outer circle of mine hair," said Friar Tuck, woefully pointing to the single halo of white curls surrounding his shining red pate.

"And I have outgrown Midge and Peter both," said Will Stutely, pointing to his waistline instead of his

height, as Robin expected him to do.

And so their master listened to their little triumphs, their jokes and surprises, and his eyes were dark with sleep and he had to fight to keep his head erect. It was Little John who motioned them away, telling them to go to the river's edge and dig on its rolling green banks a resting place for the black gelding, even as, long before, men had buried Bucephalus, the horse of Alexander, beside the shining river Hydaspes. They scampered

off silently, and soon the Vale of Peace was still save for the low murmur of their voices. Little John lifted his master's wasted body as if he were a child and carried him into the little vine-covered cottage.

"Am I not to sleep in my old bed, comrade?" Robin

murmured sleepily.

"Nay, not tonight, Master. Thou hast slept under the cold stars for many months. Lie in this cool dusk, and at dawn the leaves will keep the sun's bright rays from wakening thee. Sleep, Master, the long blessed sleep that brings a man back to life. Breathe fully and deeply, and let the sweet air of Sherwood bring thee thy nut-brown color back again. Sleep, Robin, sleep as the black gelding sleeps, only waken from thy dead slumbers to new life, even as, perchance, the charger hath wakened to new life. Sleep, for thou art come home, and thy comrades attend thy awakening."

Robin Hood heard these words, heard, somehow, low plaintive music mingling with them; heard, somehow, a rushing thud of hoofs. Carried away by fairy horsemen, carried away by singing voices, carried away by Little John.

The summer wore on. Robin came back to life slowly. Each day he stayed longer in the sunlight, played pranks with his fellows, and laughed with such good cheer that the lines in his face were turned into happy ones instead of grim ravages of suffering. Plans were abroad for the rescue of Richard. The Caesar of Germany had received the ransom and had paid a third of it to the Duke of Austria as his share of the prize. The assembling of a new diet was to be called, that the date of the prisoner's release be decided upon. Some

said that the King would be in England for Christmas. All these rumors came to Robin Hood's ears, but he seemed to have lost his ability to suffer more, to wring another emotion from his tired heart. The outlaws tried to keep from their chief's ears the news of Earl John's treacherous plans to bribe the Duke of Austria to kidnap Richard again. They talked to him of gay and happy things. Friar Tuck capered for him. Will Stutely pretended at awkwardness, and they told him he was indeed a bad actor, for anyone could tell that his stumblings were on purpose. And Robin smiled a little more each day, and they knew that he was almost himself again.

"What he truly needs," thought Little John, "is

something to make him command again."

So, when a few days later Will Scarlet received a hastily scrawled note from his old friend Roger de Lacy, saying he had matters of some importance to discuss with Robin Hood, Little John rejoiced, knowing that even matters of unimportance were what Robin Hood needed to occupy his active mind.

"Bring the good De Lacy to us at once," Robin Hood smiled. "Perchance he will be jealous of thee, Will Scarlet, since thou hast entertained Lady Fitzwalter here, but nevertheless bring him here. Should there be a challenge to tournament over that fair lady's token, I should like at least to be the judge."

"What makes you think that this matter concerneth Lady Fitzwalter?" said Will somewhat crossly.

"Why, I thought that Roger de Lacy had no other thought in his head," teased Robin.

So they looked forward to the arrival of the indolent lord of Nottingham, knowing that something of interest must be afoot since he deigned to ride his horse all the

way to their camp.

He came in a flurry of heat and dust, mopping his handsome brow and chattering in a never-ceasing stream. "By every saint, 'tis not worth it, this traveling, this running on errands for others. They do not even wish the errands run, perchance," he ended gloomily.

"Come, thou art in a strange mood indeed for the De Lacy we know," said Will Scarlet. "Cross, crabbed, worried—age it is, coming upon thee, perchance."

"We were born in the same year," retorted De Lacy.

"If it cometh upon me, it cometh upon thee also."

"Many things come upon both of you," said Will Stutely wickedly, "age, and love of the same lady—" but his impudence was interrupted by a large hand descending upon him.

"Tis about that very lady I have come," said De Lacy, wrinkling his brows. "Thou knowest I am of no use at all in a time of trouble, so methought it was Robin Hood would be of greatest help to come to in my distress."

Will Scarlet had turned pale at the mention of Lady Fitzwalter's name, and now leaned forward eagerly. "Yea, thou didst right, De Lacy. Whereas you and I can only sing a song and dance a pavone, Robin can untie the sorriest knots and tangles."

"What is it that can have happened to the lady?" asked Robin. "Methought she was safe in the hands of Queen Eleanor, the much-sought prize of the court of London."

"And there she is, Robin Hood," answered De Lacy. "And just as you say, the prize of the season, as yet uncaptured, praise God!"

"Then 'tis not that she has married," gasped Will Scarlet in relief.

"Nay, nay, nay! I would not weep or continue to woo or whine to my neighbors if that were it," said De Lacy with scorn. "I cherish little hope that Maid Marian will ever be mine, and 'tis just as well, for I could not keep so lovely a treasure in my hold for long. I have not the energy."

"Then tell us what concerneth Maid Marian that concerneth us too," ordered Robin Hood.

"Only this — that her father is most certainly dead. My dearest friend — thou hast never suspected me of other acquaintances than the gay bloods of the townwas a monk at Newstead Abbey. Ye may know that all the monks in that abbey went on Richard's crusade save a few old and ailing ones who still sit in its dark cells. Abbé Philipe came to me a few nights ago. I saw in him the same good Philipe I used to chat with, but his body was covered with wounds, and we both know he has little longer to live. He brought the news that nearly all of Richard's company were wiped out, and that Lord Hugh died in the attack at Acre-died in an onslaught of victory. The good Philipe stood near him as he fell, and the dying lord whispered to him these strange words that I can find no meaning to fit: 'A stranger beareth a message for my child. Seek him out and tell him of my death.' Of course, 'twas but the wandering mind of death that made him dream of making so impossible a request. Who could find a stranger? Did he ever leave a message? These were the thoughts of Philipe, but he determined on his return to come to me, knowing that I had been present at Lord Hugh's farewell."

"Certainly—the message he spoke of leaving—" said Will Scarlet. "I was told of it by thee thyself, Robin Hood, on our way home. Who could have been the man who received the trust and has not yet given it up?"

"Why should he have surrendered it?" murmured Robin Hood. "Lord Hugh told him not to tell Lady Marian until he was certain of her father's death."

"How dost thou know?" persisted Will.

"I know because I was that man," said Robin Hood.

The outlaws looked at their master in amazement. It was Roger de Lacy who heaved a great sigh of relief, and said, "Ah, then 'tis thy problem, not mine, the saints be praised! I like not dying messages. They are so difficult."

They could not have found a more serious moment to laugh, but laugh they all did at this young lord whose goodness of heart o'ercame all but his laziness.

"Twas a strange message," said Robin Hood softly. "But it is for the ears of Lady Fitzwalter first. How can we send for her without unduly alarming her and setting her enemies on their guard?"

"That, at least, is settled for thee," laughed De Lacy. "The sheriff of Nottingham is giving a great archery prize—an arrow of gold. 'Tis a bait for thee, Robin, and a challenge, hoping to prove there are other archers in the county as great as thou and thy men. Earl John, Queen Eleanor, and nobles and ladies of the court of London are invited to attend this tournament, and attend they will, for the fame of Robin Hood hath impressed England even more than before, since thy mission for Richard's ransom. And Lady Fitzwalter will come, not only because all the young ladies of the court will be there

wearing their rose velvets and snowy furs, but because of thee, Robin Hood, successful phantom indeed of that lady's dreams, more than a rival for all of us who seek her heart."

Robin Hood looked at De Lacy so disinterestedly and coldly that the young man blushed. And all the outlaws who had heard of Robin Hood for the first time as the favorite of the queenly Maid Marian stared in wide-eyed amazement at their chief's moody expression. They knew not what to expect. They knew not what they thought. Would Robin take Maid Marian to be his wife, as Allin-a-Dale had taken Laurel of the pale gold hair? Were they to lose him, perchance, some day? Why had they never suspected? He answered all their questions with one simple statement that left them as mystified as before.

"Never speak of me as the suitor of Lady Fitzwalter," he said in a queer rushing torrent of words. "She is naught to me but a child, a playful squirrel of the forest, a rare and lovely flower. I take no love from any earthly being. I give no love to any save these comrades close beside me. Never shall I know aught of earthly love or womanliness save its reflected radiance seen in the Virgin Mary."

They were all very still. At last Roger de Lacy moved restlessly and said in his quiet, amused voice, "I do not understand thee, but 'tis well—'twould be a worry, a great effort. Thou speakest like a monk living a life of celibacy, yet thou art as unlike a monk hidden away from life as can be, as strong and great a specimen of man as any I have seen. Then Will Scarlet and I may continue our chase of the laughing lady?"

"'Tis just the trouble," moaned Will. "Laughing she is, and laughing at us. And what heart that laughs at any man has as well ever loved that very man?"

"None, none, none," sang Friar Tuck. "But life

is full of surprises, perchance this is one."

They looked at him scornfully. Will paced the ground moodily. Roger de Lacy whistled a gay, inconsequential tune that drifted off into broken snatches of melody. Robin Hood's eyes were glowing coals. His face was lit with the strange light Little John had grown accustomed to, since his return from this great trip through England. He sighed a little at this mood of his master's. Somehow a change had come, and they could not ever be near him until they understood that change.

"Fare thee well, De Lacy," said Robin Hood, rousing himself from his dreams. "We shall all be at the great archery tournament within the fortnight. Thou wilt know us by the feathers of our arrows. Will Scarlet will have a tuft from the redstart's wing; Little John, a golden feather from the little yellow finch; myself, a bit of the snowy owl. I shall endeavor to speak to Lady Marian. and thou shalt go with us in search of her father's message. The meeting place, beyond the wall of the castle on the rocks; the time, midnight of the tournament day."

Roger de Lacy bowed before Robin Hood, and with a careless chuck under Will Scarlet's chin, left them. He waved at them indolently. A swaying breeze caught his hat and swung it back to them. "Let it stay - let it lie there happily, as I, its master, would give much to lie in the soft clover," he murmured idly. And they laughingly watched his departure, like a graceful ship born off by a gentle breeze.

And then they turned their eyes to Robin Hood, knowing somehow that his dismissal of De Lacy meant that he had words to say to them. They found him regarding them with a look of complete happiness, as if the answer to some troublous question had given him peace. His face was almost boyish as he began to explain to them in a breathless, eager way.

"Comrades, let me tell ve what a golden dream came to me soon after I left ye some months ago. true visitation from the sacred Lady Mary. She came not with pomp and display, nor with mystery and fearinspiring storm and stress. A ray of sun, a radiant moment when I was aware of her, through the medium of mine eyes perchance it was, or only in my heart. And she spoke to me, saying that should I reject all earthly pleasures, my dream for a united England would come true. And until then, comrades, I had had little plan for my life. I had supposed that I would live always with you—that my vision for the Saxons would remain ever radiant in my heart. But even as she spoke, I saw that the lovely Lady Fitzwalter had it in her power to leave her touch upon me. I saw that should I take her. 'twould mean that I must leave all of you, for I cannot love more than human heart can love, and that part of me that I have not given into the keeping of the Sacred Lady Mary has been given into your keeping in return for the love and loyalty ye bear me. Tell me that I have not acted wrongly. Tell me that our mission is not yet ended and that ye need me for its fulfillment."

They saw now for the first time how strangely idealistic their leader was. They were ashamed for a moment at their own lack of sensitiveness. It was Little John

who spoke for them, and they caught his smile and flashed it to their master's wistful eyes, and saw him come back to them as close as he had ever been since they had known him.

"Aye, Master, we understand. Thou hast not room for all the little joys of life since God has given thee these greater tasks to perform. 'Twould be a sorrowful day for the child Marian should she give her heart into thy keeping, since she would see thine ever-increasing sadness as the years wore on and thy work for England ceased. Love, man must have, but let thy love be for the heavenly Mary who understandeth the need we have of thee—the Sacred Lady who will share thee with us, who will lift thee to immortality."

THE GOLDEN ARROW TOURNAMENT

A trick to catch Robin Hood! De Lacy's careless words of the golden arrow tournament lingered in more than one of the sturdy outlaws' hearts. They had come to regard their master as something more precious than ever before-something a little more delicate, more needful of their protection. In quiet whispers they discussed ways of dissuading him from entering the streets of Nottingham. In their superstitious natures, once too often was always a possibility. Robin had been doing this very thing for years, with the victory always his. He had worn the disguise of peddler, of potter, of butcher, of serf, and always molded his identity into the character of him he impersonated, and his art of disguise had been so much more studied and perfect than the mere donning of another's clothes that he had been above detection. Could he do it again? Could he rouse himself from this state of convalescence both of mind and body to the supreme heights of acting that alone would make him deserving of success?

At last the outlaws went before Robin Hood, nervously and awkwardly, as they were accustomed to behave when they dared to suggest other plans than those he had undertaken.

Robin surveyed them with quiet serenity, but had they looked at him more closely they would have seen that his eyes were aglow with mischief and that the corners of his mouth quivered a little with humor. He knew every one of them so well. He saw into their candid minds and found there all their small worry about him.

He who stepped forward to speak for the others was not one of those comrades closest to the chief. Midge had flatly refused to be spokesman, saying that he would weep in the midst of his sentences and only make their master think 'twas the worry of a tender heart and not the calm judgment of maturer minds. And Little John had said, much to their amazement, that he was not sure 'twas not the best thing their master could do, instead of the worst. And Friar Tuck had only shrugged his great shoulders and cut a little caper. And no one ever knew what the little priest really thought when he did that.

The brave fellow who had agreed to speak to Robin Hood was one David of Doncaster, a man of some years who had stayed with Robin Hood's band for a long while, evincing the most dogged fidelity in the face of all danger and dreariness.

"Master," he said, his true eyes on his hero's face, "be ruled by me. Do not stir from the greenwood to go hence to the tournament at Nottingham tomorrow. To tell the truth, I'm well informed you match is a snare. 'Tis arranged by the sheriff to lure thee by addressing thy pride and arousing thy spirit. He would beguile thee into a gathering of a thousand people, all of whom would be forced to turn upon thee at the command of King John.'

"What! Dost thou call that scoundrel 'king' in my presence?" cried Robin Hood, rising majestically to his feet. "I like not thy words. Thou smellest of a coward.

Yet I know 'tis not thou alone that hath devised them. All of ye," and he swept his gaze scornfully over them, "all of ye, I say, have spurred good David to speak thus to me. Your words, comrades, do not please me. Come what may, I'll try my skill at yon brave archery."

"Thou wilt surely die, coz. 'Tis inviting the stealthy sword," said Will Scarlet quietly. "There will be a thousand spectators, any one of whom may conceal beneath his cloak a knife as sharp as a needle. A flash,

Master, and thou art done of this world."

"Why talk in this manner, Will? God hath set for me certain tasks. There must come an end to all things. If tomorrow marks the day for me to bid farewell to dreams as yet untried, tomorrow marks that day. 'Tis the answer, brothers, the only answer to this talk of stealthy shining weapons plunging upon me from the shadows."

"Certainly we must go," said Little John. "And listen, all, and ye shall know how it shall be that we need not be recognized. We'll leave behind us our mantles of Lincoln green. Such a wearing of color would make the sheriff's hunt too easy. One shall wear white, another red, one yellow, another blue, the black of mourning, the purple of royalty. Thus disguised, we can mingle with the thousand spectators and shoot with the hundred contestants, and we shall be put down as only some of those villagers from the furthermost corners of Nottinghamshire who are quite unfamiliar to the people of Nottingham."

In spite of their fear for Robin's safety, they could not help a flutter of excitement in their hearts at the thought of the splendid display of skill their three great archers, Little John, Will Scarlet, and Robin Hood himself, would show. They scampered off to prepare garments enough for the whole band in every color of the rainbow save forest green. And as they pulled down jerkins and doublets, capes and mantles, they laughed in happy remembrance of the pranks they had played in the collecting thereof — of the fat town burghers forced to give up their cloaks and don Lincoln green, of the butchers and peasants, the mayors and baillifs that had run home coatless from the forest. A wardrobe of adventures, indeed, confronted them. Little John sat decorating his arrows with the feathers of the goldfinch, and Will Scarlet with those of the redstart, and Robin with those of the snowy owl.

Nottingham looked as it did on a fair day, like the court of England at London town, like a festival in May. Every manor had hung pennants from its window sills, ablaze with the color of the family arms or the emblems of the King. The fair grounds had been turned into a pavilion where colored awnings rose tier on tier, and special boxes draped in satin and velvet were thrones for the King, queen mother, and the high judiciaries of the little town. It was that last moment before the arrival of the villagers that so fills those who have done their best with despair. The young damsels of the village who since early dawn had been bringing armfuls of autumn flowers to bank the stands, anxiously asked each other if there were enough. The little boys who had earned the shillings flung by the nobles who were fostering the tournament with the sheriff, continued to clamber up the flagpoles like small dark-skinned monkeys to hang still more strings of flags.

"They say that Lady Fitzwalter is to come down for the tournament," said one country girl to another. "I wonder if the gallants pursued her in London town as much as the young men of Nottingham used to do. Faith, I never walked past the castle that one of the lords was not singing her a sad song 'neath her casement. Canst thou imagine it? I have never had a song sung to me save by the old fat schoolmaster, and I'd rather stay single than marry him."

"Ah, they say she hath many a new love, but that she keepeth her heart to herself. How cruel she was to that charming lord, De Lacy! He is quite thin and

pale since she hath gone."

"He is thin and pale 'cause he is too lazy to do any work and sitteth in his house all day drinking imported wines from France, I am told," said another maiden who had joined the little gossips.

"I, for one, cannot wait until this tournament begins," said one whom they called Lucy, tossing her fair curls

and opening her blue eyes wide with excitement.

"Why, is't not just another one of those long and tedious affairs got up by the sheriff that the town folk may like him the better?" asked one of them.

"Nay, 'tis a trick to get Robin Hood here!" said

Lucy.

"But nay, it cannot be! How dost thou know? Why, 'tis rumored that Sir Guy and the sheriff have agreed to let that outlaw be, since he has captured them so many times and they have never been able to capture him in return."

"So they say, and 'tis a right cowardly way to lure him here, methinks," said Lucy indignantly. "But I, for one, do not think they will catch him, though they are bringing many of the royal guard down for the very purpose."

"He is clever but very reckless, and will perchance walk right into the trap," said one wench, nodding her

head shrewdly.

"Well, he will be easy enough to find, for he weareth Lincoln green and is the most handsome man alive, I am told."

"Nay, he is old, very old, I have heard," said Lucy wisely.

"Of course not! He is as young as De Lacy himself,"

the other retorted.

"Nay, nay! Why he hath lived since Thomas á Becket's day, and looketh like a dried-up old monk with the expression of a saint," said another.

"Not really old," broke in the prettiest damsel of all with a dreamy look, "just the right age, thou knowest, middle age when a man is iron gray of hair and strong and well aware of life—"

"Oh, thou tirest me with thy philosophies," stormed Lucy. "Now, I know—"

But what she knew they were never to find out, for just then a distant horn broke the stillness, and soon the air was rife with trumpets and singing. The gates were open, and the field was dotted with pennants and dancing horses.

From the high judge's stand the sheriff looked down eagerly upon the seething crowd of some eight hundred men. Instinctively his eyes sought every jerkin of green, but the greens were the Saxon greens and Kendal greens of cheaper cloth worn by the peasants of neighboring

villages. Nowhere did the lustrous leaf-green called Lincoln, and made famous by the outlaws, appear.

"I told thee," said Sir Guy of Gisborne crossly, "that all this was but the waste of good money. Robin Hood, I am told, is near to death, and none of his comrades would leave him to walk into thy trap."

"Faith," answered the sheriff, scratching his round head, "methought they would have been here, and thy words of Robin Hood's illness will not be believed by me until I see the rascal shivering with the ague and pale with the fever of death. Nay," he muttered to himself, "I could have sworn they would be bold enough to try to win the priceless arrow. 'Twas a challenge to him, and I thought he would meet it boldly, clad in his Lincoln green that I might know him surely."

In the gallery of ladies who had traveled down from London, two captured the attention of the onlookers. The queen mother. Eleanor, magnetic with the atmosphere of old loves and distant glories, queen of other days and queen of this day. She gazed often at her graceful companion. Lady Fitzwalter, who was like a dark red rose, a flashing slim figure in rich velvets, a crown of rubies in her hair and a circlet of flaming jewels against her snowy throat. She looked younger than ever, thought those who had watched her so often in Nottingham. Like a little girl dressed in the cast-off garments of grown-ups given to the children for play, she was at one moment; and the next, the haughty lady of Dallom Lea, that marvelous estate forfeited by the debts of her father, Lord Hugh. Her gaze seemed to pass like that of a restless, dissatisfied little child from the boxes that held the nobles of the shire to the open tiers of benches

where sat those commoners who had come to cheer and watch those of their people who had entered the contest. And she found not what she wanted, it seemed, for again she would start at the highest box and her eyes would search the crowd desperately, while she continued her light chatter, her gentle flirting with De Lacy and the other young lords attending her.

And now, before the archery contest, a preliminary joust of horsemen in tournament was to be held. The knights came forward, gayly bowing before the ladies and holding aloft the tokens that had been given them by the gallery of noble beauties from London town. Only Lady Marian held her red ribbon the tighter as they passed, and laughingly told them she was keeping it for the winner of the golden arrow.

Loud were the trumpets and crash of music in time with the thrusting of swords. Here indeed was beauty and a thrilling dangerous spectacle. A "tournament of devils," the pious hermits had called the jousts, since men who went down in this glorious moment of excitement met their death without the benefit of absolution, met their God without confession and blessing from a priest. And the superstition in many a young man's heart that should he fall from his horse, slain without absolution, his unclean spirit would go down into hell forevermore, kept him from fighting with that abandon and daring that was less dangerous than a retreating battle.

Maid Marian's heart ached for a moment as she saw the splendid onslaught of horsemen, for well she knew that some would fall, whether to be wounded slightly or mortally. She had studied each face carefully and felt certain that none of Robin Hood's men had ridden into the grounds. Perchance they were hiding in the crowds and would shoot for the arrow. She pushed them from her mind and turned her attention to a youth she had known from early childhood, Robert Dunstan, who seemed bent on the most reckless fighting of all. It was a glowing moment for her to see one of her blood, a Norman, forgetful of pride and hauteur, forgetful of the false dignity she had long hated in him, giving his heart and soul to a moment of glory. And then, as he caught his breath in laughing excitement at his own thrusts, one of his own playmates, a Norman of ill-bred tastes, struck him a most cowardly and underhanded blow with the sharp edge of his weapon. The boy fell, his hands thrown above his head in a helpless movement of terror, his delicate features contorted with pain.

A long-drawn cry smote the crowd. They covered their eyes. They thought of his young spirit meeting death without the comfort of absolution, his young heart alone in death. Looking again, they saw a sight that filled them with amazement. A man clad in scarlet, a frail, stern-faced Saxon no longer young, had pushed his way through the frightened, rearing horses and lifted the young Norman. With the dark hair of the boy close to his own pale cheeks, the Saxon rushed to the edge of the crowd where, as if by magic, a man in cowl and robe appeared.

The man in scarlet stood motionless, supporting the dying boy while the priest gave him the benefit of absolution in a low, soothing voice. Then the nobility of Nottinghamshire saw a look of peace come over Robert Dunstan's frightened face, a happy look of surrender. They heard him say in a sweet, unearthly voice, "God

bless thee, stranger! I meet my God in peace and cleanliness, a clean heart and soul within my bleeding body."

It was an unbelievable thing that had happened. A common Saxon, an unheard-of priest, had lifted a young Frenchman from the terror of death in a tournament to an honored, peaceful end. Death would be a long sleep now to young Robert Dunstan, instead of the worried, harried hereafter their superstitious minds believed would have attended him. The hearts of the Normans there were touched by this act. They reached forth their hands and tried to touch the man in scarlet as he mingled with the crowd and was soon lost to them, and they tried to call him, but they knew not what to say, so they shouted, "Good Saxon, brave Saxon, come back," with fervor and sincerity in their anxious tones.

And Robin Hood, filled with a great weariness and pity for the young man who had died, felt a warm glow of happiness in his heart as he heard them calling him. Never had he dared to hope a group of Normans would cry out their gratitude and their desire to meet a Saxon. He had found that what he had always thought, was true. The Normans were just men with hearts that had forgotten how to be simple, and the Saxons were men who had forgotten their right to feel and think. Englishmen would be Normans and Saxons whose hearts beat as one, even as his heart had felt the dying heart of the young Frenchman close against it a moment before.

The stillness broke. The soft sighing of many men was like the breath of a summer wind across a meadow of grasses. It was as if one could see the crowd turning away from that great moment of tragic death and facing a new incident hopefully.

The pages blew their trumpets loudly, the music played again, and figures carried the wounded from the field, shielded by the dark forms of noble chargers so that the audience might forget the pain and suffering hidden from their sight.

And now there was held aloft a graceful arrow with a shaft of pure gold and a head of silver, an arrow that was to be remembered for many a long day hence as the most beautiful and valuable prize ever offered in archery contests in England. It gleamed in the sunlight, seeming almost to quiver in sensitive eagerness for flight. The line of men was long. Many wished to try their skill, many hoped for the luck of heaven, many prayed that the arrow might be theirs. The squires called forth the names of those who shot, often dubbing the men by the garments they wore, that they might be better remembered. "Blue Jacket," "Brown," "Brave Yellow," and so it went, until only three archers remained in the last round of shots to decide the victor. And, strangely enough, all of these men wore scarlet, and the tips of their arrows bore little distinguishing feathers, one yellow, one as red as the jerkin of its owner, and one pure and snowy white. And all of these three scarlet contestants eved each other coldly and nodded curtly, as if they knew each other not.

The first to shoot was the man whose arrow had a red feather. He seemed a little younger than the others, both by the grace his figure showed and by the bright gold of his uncovered head. He looked not unlike many a Saxon youth of the countryside, save that his features were somewhat finer than the ordinary Saxon's son. He aimed with some display of effort, a little over-drawing

of his bow before he let it relax, a balancing of his body, and a grim expression about his young mouth. The arrow flew with a little too much suddenness, a jerk that spoiled the harmony of graceful movement. But it was but a hair's breadth from the center of the target, and the crowd rose as if they were a single man to lean forward and cheer. The young man smiled at them, and it seemed almost as if he dared to meet the eyes of the haughty Lady Fitzwalter for a flashing second.

The next who came forth to shoot was the archer whose arrow was tipped with the yellow feather. He was a man of great height, but as many of the contestants had come from sturdy stock and were men of enormous breadth and size, this was not noticeable. In fact, he was the least noticeable of the three last archers in the contest, since he had a grave and somewhat stolid face. unlit by the excitement of the moment. He, too, seemed not to be acquainted with his rivals, for he had watched the first archer with curious attentiveness as if the man's skill was entirely unlooked for and unexpected. aim was deliberate, yet accompanied by more ease than that of the younger shooter. He looked for some time at the target, and at last shot without any of the unexpectedness of the first shooter. The audience felt that he had measured the distance, the wind, the size of the target — in fact, done all those things that men were taught to do, and that when he had shot he had done so because 'twas the time he had decided upon. They caught their breath in wonder as his arrow struck the bull's eye, and yet they felt somehow as if he deserved the beauty of that shot. They turned to the last archer with a feeling of anti-climax. There was naught left for

this man to do. The bull's eye had been hit by the second shooter. And yet, when they saw the third figure a feeling of tenseness came over them, a moment of expectation. There was an expression of glowing life in this older man's face that distinguished him from any other man on the field. Such a glow might have been in Lion-Heart's eyes, Queen Eleanor thought to herself suddenly. Such a glow as that might have lived in the spiritual face of a happy Christ.

Afterward there was none who could swear that he did not even insert an arrow in his bow, but none who could swear they saw him do it. All the amazed eyes of the crowd beheld was the arrow already in the bull's eye which suddenly split asunder and two arrows fell to the ground, and then still another arrow inserted itself in the empty bull's eye. The stranger in scarlet had shot two arrows in less time than either of his competitors had shot one. He had put, not only one, but two arrows in the bull's eye, and had knocked out the one of his opponent!

The sheriff of Nottingham beamed with delight as he handed forth the golden arrow to the man in scarlet, with the cryptic remark, "I am glad of the color of thy jerkin, man."

The bearer of the golden arrow was soon lost in the milling, eager crowd again, and the sheriff cried for music and trumpeting as the guests of the tournament sank back, worn out with excitement and ready to rest a little before their departure.

"Ha," Sir Guy of Gisborne said with sly laughter, "at least we know now that Robin Hood is not the only perfect shot in the land!"

It seemed to the sheriff that the surging mob that passed in front of his box at the moment Sir Guy spoke hesitated a brief second before moving on. He was seized with the absurd feeling that a hundred eyes of hate looked up at them. He twisted uneasily and, addressing the people in the boxes, suggested they go to Nottingham Castle for song and dance and great feasting. It was when his heart had lost a little of its terror, and the last of the townsmen had gone out of the gates of the field, that a whirring arrow flew directly over the heads of the nobility and pinned itself in the feathered hat the sheriff carried. A girlish voice screamed. Oueen Eleanor swaved a little from the shock of that near-death that had passed above their heads, the sheriff's hat dropped from his nerveless hands to the ground. But it was Sir Guy of Gisborne who picked it up and tore from the arrow's slim body a pierced sheet of parchment with words written upon it.

He read the message aloud, his face growing a queer sick vellow.

"Robin Hood thanks thee for the golden arrow. Will Scarlet and Little John cannot quite outshoot their master yet," the message read.

"Three of the scoundrels, all in our grasp, all toying with us," screamed the sheriff.

"Why didst thou not recognize them?" said Sir Guy sourly. "Is it the garments that make a man? Canst thou tell a Robin Hood only by his Lincoln green?"

"Thou hast seen him as often as I," shouted the sheriff.

Queen Eleanor then spoke in her abrupt, dominating fashion, "None can know a Robin Hood eternally. He

changeth even as the day changeth from radiant dawn to dark and somber night. 'Twas he who held the Norman youth against his heart, and at that moment his face, deep with compassion, looked most unlike the laughing faun who shot the arrows of wonder.'

"Why, though, why should he do so sweet a deed for Robert Dunstan, a Norman, a French boy for whom he hath no love?" cried Maid Marian.

"This man is too great for little hates," said Queen Eleanor impatiently. "Dost thou think he dislikes Normans for being Normans? It hath, mark my words, some bearing upon his own people, his supposed hatred. When a Norman loses his power and is just a hurt and dying boy, alone and afraid, Robin Hood gladly carries him back to safety and a death that he may look forward to as a long and blessed sleep."

"I do not understand thee, madame," said Sir Guy in an ingratiating manner. "Thou art—er—defending the outlaw, Robin Hood?"

"Of course thou understandest not, fool! And whether I defend the outlaw or condemn him, 'tis not thy affair. And whether I defend or condemn him little matters. He is aloof from all, above my praise or blame, above the power of Norman lords, above the power of Saxon revenge."

Lady Marian took the Queen's arm and they swept into a waiting carriage. It was a little soft-eyed page who slipped into Maid Marian's hand a fragment of parchment. She hid it instinctively, even from the eyes of the kindly Queen. They drove to the castle and she chattered like a young magpie of all the excitement they had had. The Queen's old eyes were dim with weariness,

and she yawned ungracefully and wished she could go to bed, now that the thrilling day was done. Instead, they were whisked from lighted hall to hall. Music played; cavaliers attended them. They sat at a great banquet and were toasted by men like De Lacy, whose greatest virtues were in their minds and not in their bodies. At last Maid Marian slipped away for a moment and read hastily the phrase, "De Lacy will take thee to Robin Hood, who hath a message for thee."

Her cheeks glowed, her eyes swam with tears. Life took on a strange and unreal existence of mystery the rest of the evening. She sought out De Lacy, much to that idle lord's pleasure, and showed him the message.

"So I am to be thy protector against the wicked outlaw?" he teased.

"Foolish! Thou protect!" Her scorn was lost in her sweet excitement. "Wicked—thou callest him wicked—I call him a saint," she cried impatiently.

"And whom dost thou call a saint, dear child?" she heard the tremulous voice of Earl John say with overbearing kindness.

"Lady Mary," she retorted mischievously, as she danced away from him.

She danced more gracefully than ever before, and Roger de Lacy was the envy of all the young lords of Nottingham, for the beautiful Lady Fitzwalter scarce left him the whole evening.

"And she never would look at him before except to laugh," said one youth gloomily.

It was Sir Guy of Gisborne's son, the pale and cowardly young Geoffrey, who watched with growing amazement the attentiveness of Lady Marian to the charming De Lacy. It was he who bit his pale lips until they bled, who worked his poor and stupid brain to try to understand her sudden change. He who had so long obeyed his father's orders, who had ceased to think, even, of what his father planned for him, awoke suddenly to suspicion and his first real emotion. He knew that Lady Fitzwalter had loved not this De Lacy any more than she had loved him. He knew that she cherished a deep devotion for the elusive Robin Hood. So he spied upon this fickle damsel, ever beyond the vision of her clear, disdainful gaze the long evening through, determined in a strange new dogged way to find out what trick she was up to, why De Lacy so suddenly was acceptable to her.

It was shortly before midnight that she disappeared with the indolent lord. He waved his hand debonairly at the other youths, who glared at him jealously but could not help smiling in the end as he followed the lovely lady into the great gardens.

They left behind them a buzz of gossip, a whirring little moment when pretty maidens inclined their heads together and said, "Dost thou really think she has decided suddenly to marry him?"

"But he is the nicest lord in England, even if he is the most idle and gay."

"But she could have had—she really could have, I'm told—Earl John himself, and then she'd have been queen!"

All this they left behind, but they knew not what they bore with them — a cringing shadow, a sneaking, prying child-man, Geoffrey, whose weak mind had been maddened to a peak of rage that had turned his cowardly

heart into one that had no fear. The boy who had wooed Maid Marian against her will turned suddenly into an uncertain madman at the thought of her wooing by another. How often he stopped just in time to prevent his detection—here by the wall where Maid Marian said laughingly:

"What would I do without thee, De Lacy? And to think I have never appreciated thy worth before! Thou wouldst dare to meet the outlaw Robin Hood for me."

And the impassioned follower of these two knew not that she teased, knew not that De Lacy was a friend of Robin Hood's. He read wrongly all her gentle compliments, paid with the generous hand of one who knows a man loves her but does not demand her return affection.

Down the rough rocks in the silver moonlight went the man. And the two ahead of him, oblivious of their shadowy pursuer, laughed with gayety, held each other's hands in sudden glowing warmth at their adventure. Down into the shadows again, down to the caves of the Castle Rock and into them. And crawling after them, the weak-minded Geoffrey heard them greeted by low voices, and he listened with dull attentiveness to the long conversation that followed, listened with quickened interest for a while, listened in a stupor of incomprehension, his muddled, stupid mind a painful chaos of misunderstanding.

"I LIE WITH ISEULT'S DUST 'NEATH SHROVETIDE YEW"

The voices within the cave sounded like echoes to the listener outside. It reminded him of the days of long ago when he and Maid Marian had played here on the rocks and called into the hollows to hear their voices return to them, higher, fainter, yet crystal clear. Now, tonight, Lady Fitzwalter's voice came to him again from the cave.

"Then my father is truly never to return to me?" There was a quiet grief in her voice that made those near her turn their faces into the darker shadows.

The man outside, a curious transformation in his weak mind, reacted far differently. Her father dead! The words clicked in his brain. "And that meaneth — steadily now, what doth it mean exactly?" He was fighting desperately to hold his thread of thought. He who had never had a problem that was not solved for him by quicker minds, he who had lived and been brought up with only one thought — that he was to have the hand of his childhood playmate—now found that this dream of a lifetime so recently taken from him, might return. Her father dead! What did the words mean? They had a meaning he was quite certain, a meaning for him and Lady Marian, and for Lord De Lacy, who had stolen his prize. And then the voices continued and he found again that keener minds than his were answering his problem.

"Thy father left thee a message, Lady Fitzwalter," came a faint cool voice from the shadows. "He told thee, thou rememberest, he would do so."

"And how did he come to choose thee, Robin?"

"I know not, save that he whispered to me that he had a faint distrust of all the nobility of Nottingham. Perchance he even had a distrust of me, for he left his message in a strange form, a single phrase that meaneth naught to me but perchance meaneth something to thee, for whom it was intended."

"Oh, what was this word he left for me?"

"This he charged me to remember," answered the far-off voice, "'I lie with Iseult's dust 'neath Shrovetide yew."

A small cloud passed before the face of the silver moon, momentarily dulling the brightness of the scene outside the rocks where the lone figure of Geoffrey crouched. A cool breath of wind made him shiver. It was as if the spirit of another world stirred at the sound of the softly uttered words that had come to his ears. How strange that he alone besides Maid Marian in all the world should know the meaning of that phrase, "I lie with Iseult's dust 'neath Shrovetide yew." His distorted mind was filled with a new sense of power. He laughed to himself a little breathlessly.

"What dost thou think my father's message will be?" Maid Marian said.

"I know not, child, unless it give thee some power of releasing thyself from the hold of Sir Guy. De Lacy hath told me the sum thy father was indebted for. 'Tis an amount beyond my power to comprehend. 'Tis something thou must forget.'

"Nay," she said proudly, "my father's debt is mine. His honor shall not be taken from him while he sleeps in death. It is in my power to pay that debt by the marrying of poor weak-minded Geoffrey. I shall, of course, do that very thing."

"Let us speak not of that until we have tried all else," broke in Will Scarlet passionately. "What doth thy father's message mean? Or can we not be let into thy confidence?"

"Of course," she said in a quick hurt voice. "Long ago when Geoffrey and I played together, went to school. received our religious devoirs as one, and all such childish teachings, my father would take us to Newstead Abbev. the nearest great abbey to Nottingham, in the northern parts of Sherwood. When the weather was fine we went nearly every fortnight, riding our little shining ponies, looking forward to it more for the beauty of the ride and the strange mysteries of the great abbey than for the prayers we learned from the old monks there. And all about the grounds we had our special spots to play, since my father spent long hours at prayer in the little chapel near by. Niches and crannies there were, such as no other place in our small surroundings held, and great oaks and yew trees that made those familiar trees at Dallom Lea, my father's estate, seem like mere saplings. And here was a great tree apart from the others that claimed the largest part of our play hours. We called it the "Shrovetide yew," for my father was always most careful to name exactly all things he could, that our education might be given to us in our playtime as well as in our tutoring periods. 'Tis an old story that I will not draw out to long lengths, of a small curly spaniel that

Geoffrey and I adored and took with us wherever we went. The name of the little dog was a subject of great dispute, Geoffrey wishing it to be a 'he' and to call him 'Tristam,' and I wishing it to be a lady, and call her 'Iseult.' The spaniel bore the name of 'Iseult.' generally got what I wished. One day as we rode eagerly toward the abbey, Geoffrey, who often was possessed with mischief that carried with it a touch of meanness, rode his pony over the little spaniel, so that the little dog was between its four legs. I screamed at him to stop his reckless play, but again and again, as the little bewildered spaniel tore out from under the pony, Geoffrey would lead the animal back to where the dog had gone. And then the spaniel jumped away too late, and the hoof of the pony struck him a swift blow, so that he lay quite dead, killed by his own playmate. From that moment until this I have hated Geoffrey, hated him for his weakness and a streak of almost criminal intent within him, a cold, cruel type of maliciousness that is touched with the insanity of a weak mind, and therefore all the more unexpected in its attack. We buried the dog beneath Shrovetide yew, and my good father forced me to allow Geoffrey to say a prayer over the grave with me. for Lord Hugh Fitzwalter was never one to believe the worst of another. 'Tis undoubtedly beneath the Shrovetide yew at Newstead Abbey, facing the north where the dust of Iseult lies, that my father's message is buried."

"I will go with thee at once," cried De Lacy. "I

like nothing better than a buried treasure."

Will Scarlet and Little John sat uneasily silent. Newstead Abbey! How could they ever forget the day when they had gone to Wakefield together and had stumbled upon it, and had heard Robin Hood's voice ordering them away. Newstead Abbey, built by the false King Henry to absolve himself from the crime of Thomas á Becket's murder!

"We must not go until tomorrow in the early afternoon, when the visitors from London have returned," said Maid Marian. "Thou knowest I am a lady-inwaiting to Queen Eleanor, who treateth me like a child of her own, so that I owe her my consideration. I must needs hurry back at once lest she be waiting for me now."

"But I may go with thee," Roger De Lacy urged persistently, with an odd note of pathos in his entreaty. It was as if he could not bear yet to give up the treasure of Maid Marian's companionship which had been so entirely his for that one evening just part

entirely his for that one evening just past.

Perchance Lady Fitzwalter waited for the words of Robin Hood and Will Scarlet, but if she was disappointed that they offered not to go with her, she did not let De Lacy know. It was her kindest voice that answered him warmly, "Welcome, friend. I need thy aid in finding my father's message and thy advice as to what I am to do to pay my father's debt. I like not the idea of throwing myself at Sir Guy. Perchance thou wilt go to him in the near weeks and say that I am willing to marry his son to absolve my father's debt to him."

"Oh," broke in Will Scarlet in the same fiery, restless tones, "speak not thus, Lady Fitzwalter. Give Robin Hood and his merry men a chance to think upon thy problem. The sum of money is indeed great, but great are the resources of many a noble in England."

"Then tomorrow, an hour past noon," said De Lacy happily, "I ride with the lady of my heart to the north of Sherwood, fearing not those rude bandits of the outlaw Robin Hood who are said to inhabit the forest," he teased.

They came forth from the dark caves into the glory of silver moonlight. They did not see the figure of Geoffrey huddled in the shadows. Robin Hood and his merry men disappeared like silent forest animals, and Maid Marian and De Lacy walked toward the castle.

The man who was left alone paced the rocky ledges. His heart ached with a wild unreasoning jealousy of De Lacy. He did not understand. Maid Marian had never pretended she would marry De Lacy, any more than she had pretended she would marry him! His thoughts were a maelstrom of swirling experiences of past and present and future. Ah, yes, she was right! He had tracked the little spaniel to its death, since his playmate had loved it more than any other thing. Something of the feeling of joy in relentless pursuit that he had felt when he chased the little spaniel came over him when he thought of De Lacy. He must get to the vew tree first, and he must be there waiting for them on the morrow. He staggered off into the night. Slipping past the gayly lighted castle, he made his way to the stables and, taking a swift charger, mounted it as he was. hatless and dressed in the richest velvets and laces. Turning his horse northward, he galloped into the distance. Over and over again his poor mind tried to review the things he must do. He must find her father's message before she did!—why? why? his brain asked. He did not know. He almost stopped the charger to ask some chance traveler by the roadside. But no. 'twould never do! He, Geoffrey, asking the advice of a commoner! Better to do what came into his head, regardless of reason. And he had reason for being there on the morrow—to take Maid Marian for himself, and to put De Lacy aside, even as he had put aside a little brown spaniel a decade before.

* * *

It was the first day of real autumn. A sudden change had come, and the pale golden sun of yesterday seemed to have lost its warmth over night. Lady Fitzwalter, in velvets and furs, mounted her brown horse and watched with amusement the puffing and groaning of De Lacy as he lifted his indolent person to the body of a great horse.

The grief she had felt on hearing of her father's death had left the maiden empty of feeling. All the long night through she had paced the narrow limits of her room and tried to find a piece of the sky to look upon through the barred casements. Such an irrevocable parting as death always left her a lost and lonely heart, a feeling of helplessness and fear. But now on this crisp autumn day she roused herself to a quiet facing of her future. past was done—her happy childhood, tinged with strangeness because of the death of her mother and the odd ascetiscism of her father; her maidenhood, glowing with a dream of the hero Robin Hood. She regarded the things she must do with candid eyes - marry for the sake of honor that Geoffrey whom she detested. Honor, that strange and beautiful possession that men died for and fought for, honor that did not die with them, but that lingered on in the possession of children! Even so it had come to her. With faint traces of tragedy in her dark eyes and pale cheeks, she met De Lacy that clear

autumn afternoon and set forth with him for Newstead

Abbey and the haunts of her childhood.

"What if this message of thy father's should mean thy release?" said De Lacy, trying his best to be helpful and sensible.

"Hush thee, foolish heart! Thy dreams are not always so filled with optimism."

"All but my dreams of thee," he answered sadly.

"Come, we have finished that subject long since," she laughed.

"'Tis a subject that shall always be unfinished as

far as I'm concerned," he said again.

"But thou wouldst not make a notably good husband. Look at it sensibly. The whole affair would bore theea calm wifeliness to mate—a hearth—a flowing cup."

"'Tis not so different from my present bachelorhood,"

he said in argument. "The flowing cup, I mean."

"Ah, but dost thou think that any good wife would let thee be idle and shiftless, and so filled with teasing and so armed with luck and so known for thy thoughtlessness --''

"Come, sweet, all those things do not belong to me. Luck, now, I have none of it, unless it be bad luck. Hark, there it is upon me now!"

A cuckoo had just sung four mournful notes.

"And what meanest thou?" she said.

"The cuckoo sings the hour of death, thou knowest. Mine seemeth to be at four of the clock. A good enough hour—the hour for wine and cake, and visiting fair ladies. And by my faith, the hour we shall arrive at Newstead Abbey. Perchance the monks there will try to make me one of them. A living death that, certainly!"

"Hush, how canst thou mock so at death, at religion, even at thyself!"

"But 'tis true, all of it. They live on black bread and water, those fellows, and wear a shirt of pigskin, hard and rough, and a cord binds them to their bed at night that they may surely awake each hour to say their prayers. And death! Why should not the cuckoo know as much of its striking hour as we ourselves? And death should be a matter of some comfort, I am told. Thus I prefer it at a comfortable hour. Now, early dawn, ugh! Before breakfast, never! An ugly time of day, the morning hours. And noon, too sunny, I should say, taking all the glamor from the world. Even at night, in the pale light of the moon, I'd hate to see my spirit fly away. It might get lost, you know, in the blackness. Four o'clock! An excellent hour, I say."

"Thou dost almost frighten me," she said with an odd little catch in her voice.

"And thou dost almost convince me, Lady Marian, that I have not entirely lost thee, for thou canst at least be worried about me."

She whipped her horse into a gallop, and it was a long time before he could catch up with her again. And then so out of breath he was, he could but gasp, "By four o'clock I shall be dead of breathlessness!"

"Lazy sluggard!" was all the sympathy he got.

At last they came to the hollow where the abbey stood with its two tiers of cloisters and a variety of cells and rooms about them, a stone hall, an old kitchen half covered with vines, and the abbey church. A wall with battlements entirely surrounded the gardens and house, and at the foot of the hill overlooking the hollow

nestled a large lake of a curious darkness and depth. Hills scalloped the horizons beyond and could be seen easily, for to the north Sherwood Forest came to an abrupt end, and the country spread out in a smooth plain leading to the far-off hills that made the horizon line. A river that fed the lake found its outlet in a little cascade down a slight incline, and for a moment De Lacy and Maid Marian stood breathless, watching the wild fowl brooding in the rushes, happily unaware of human intrusion. Before they found the great yew tree they passed beneath an arch. Twelve niches held the saints, and Lady Marian, pointing to them eagerly, said:

"See, Roger, that is something we used to learn that made an excellent play. Thou knowest that 'tis the custom among nuns to give each of the twelve apostles a candle, and then each nun draws from these. To whatever saint her candle belongeth she must direct her prayers and entreaties. Geoffrey and I did it by the hour, and St. Peter was of course our favorite, seeming more human than the others."

They looked higher, to the topmost pinnacle, and saw the Virgin Mother with her son in her arms gazing down at them happily and with a queer sense of reality about her fragile form. A mighty window inset with rose and purple and gold made their heads swim with its drunken glories. Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers, and a small, perfect chapel filled them with a sense of infinitude. The Gothic fountain playing in the court was carved with quaint monsters. Spring waters flowed from the mouths of apes and strange gargoyles, and the impassive faces of saints watched in seeming disapproval from the granite walls.

"There is no one about," said De Lacy, peering into hallway and church.

As if in answer, a little blind monk made his way to the door and stood there blinking his eyes in the bright sunlight like a small mole. Finally he said in a low monotonous tone:

"My brethren have gone to the Crusades and left but a few of us here. Disturb us not. The abbey is welcome to thee, but invade not our little sanctuaries where we live and pray."

"Certainly, good father," said Maid Marian, "we shall not intrude upon thee."

He disappeared as quickly as he had come, and the two stood for a moment looking at each other with suppressed laughter, like two children caught in the wrong garden at their play.

"We had best go at once to find the yew tree," De Lacy said.

She led him to that side of the abbey he had not yet seen, where a grove of trees were like shrubs clustered about a mammoth yew, reaching its gnarly boughs to the sky and bending grotesquely in the center of its great trunk. A cry of amazement and concern broke from them both as they saw the tree. The earth had been torn from the ground around its base. Great ugly channels had been roughly hacked in the hard ground, and the roots of the great yew were exposed like white, sensitive nerves, the sap bleeding from them where they had been torn asunder.

"Oh, who could have known?" was all that Maid Marian said, as she stood still, gazing at the ruin of her hopes with dark, haunted eyes. "None but Robin Hood," said De Lacy, more to himself than to her.

"Hush!" she said, turning upon him like a small angry kitten. "Dost thou dare to accuse him of coming here before me?"

De Lacy shrank from her with a look of pain in his eyes. "Lady Marian," he said with as much sternness as she had ever heard him use, "I would no more accuse Robin Hood of treachery than I would any of those twelve saints gazing down upon us from yon stone wall. I spoke to myself, to go over in my mind all who might know. And there could be no other. If another did know he would not understand thy message," he said in bewilderment.

"Wait!" she cried, touching his hand in regret for her impatient doubts of him. "Wait! Geoffrey would know what that message meant. He alone besides my father and myself, knows of the grave of the little spaniel that he killed."

"But how could Geoffrey know?" said De Lacy, his good heart stirred to depths of passion such as his indolent nature had never known existed.

"How could Geoffrey know?" sang a mocking voice above them.

Maid Marian was the first to see, for she knew how the branches grew, making a perfect seat for any who could climb to that height. Often had she seen the little Geoffrey of long ago scramble like a squirrel to this very spot and sit there hurling down twigs at her until she could have wept at his unpleasant play.

The man in the tree looked down with a sense of triumph at the white, set faces of the two below him.

He opened up a strip of parchment and read to them in a loud voice:

Little Daughter: Long have I suspected my neighbor, Sir Guy of Gisborne. But thou knowest it is not in me to fight, to accuse men, to defy wrong. I have known full well that I was in his debt solely through his treachery, but I thought it best that he should think he had been above my suspicion. When it came time for me to leave thee, I set forth to take Sir Guy this treasure that a good saint gave me long ago for work among the monks of the abbey; but something bade me hide it here. If Sir Guy of Gisborne hath done thee no wrong, I beg his pardon before God. And if he hath, pray for him, little daughter. Give him the full half of the treasure, which more than dischargeth my debt; and peace be with thee, child, forevermore.

Thy Father

Then Geoffrey crawled like a squirrel out upon the branches of the yew, branches that bent and seemed to crack beneath his weight. From the box he held, he began tossing the golden coins into the little lake, the little dark lusterless lake of curious depths.

"Stop him, stop him!" Marian cried. "Canst thou not see, Roger, he is taking from me my right to freedom and happiness? I shall have to marry him after all if the gold is not kept, for who will believe 'twas really there if he hurls it all into those bottomless depths?"

De Lacy looked at her for a moment with a gentle, whimsical smile, and then, dropping his velvet cloak, began to climb the tree. "I shall be thy Robin Hood. A true forester, after all, I may turn out to be," he called to her gayly. He did not climb gracefully and easily. He mounted the tree slowly, but the pain in his hands and in the torn muscles of his shoulders only spurred him

on. And soon, to the amazement of both Maid Marian and Geoffrey, he had reached the safety of the first great branches of the yew. It was then that Geoffrey gave a strange scream of anger, an unearthly cat scream that caused De Lacy to lose his grip and nearly fall before he had regained it again.

"Come down, Roger!" Maid Marian said in quick, commanding tones. "I have seen Geoffrey before in this mood. There is too much danger for thee there, friend. And now—it hardly matters." It was this last pathetic phrase that stirred De Lacy to another great effort. Instead of obeying her, he went up the tree and finally clung to the branches just below the reach of Geoffrey. Geoffrey pretended to see him not. He idly tossed another golden coin into the lake. Fascinated, the three watched it strike the water like a golden dot, and the black ripples ring their way from it toward the bank.

De Lacy looked down again at Maid Marian, and saw her face a blurred image of suffering—looked above him, and saw Geoffrey, a twisted human shape in the notch of a tree, his face like a wicked devil's molded from pasty dough. De Lacy went farther on his painful, hopeless journey, and reached at last the touch of Geoffrey's velvet doublet. His hand crept on until it met the small iron chest of golden coins. He wondered vaguely why the cat did not spring upon him. He wondered how a man could climb a tree and carry a box all at once. He wondered would they hurt Maid Marian if they fell. He heard himself saying with his customary air of amusement, "Marian, my sweet, peer into the lake and see if by any chance the coins glimmer on the bottom. Perchance we can fish them up."

And so it was that her head was turned when she heard the dull, terrible fall. She turned with instant comprehension of what had happened. Had she not seen the man in the tree ruthlessly kill a bewildered little spaniel years before? When she was a little girl of ten, had she not heard the same wild laughter she heard now? She bent over De Lacy, who lay a crumpled, broken heap of whiteness, of torn velvet, of the same amused contempt of things as he had had in life.

'Twas the cuckoo, sweet, blame it alone," he whispered. "Four o'clock by the sun, and the cuckoo. My luck, thou knowest. Forgive me for saving thee not. Forgive me. Forgive me for never learning how to climb a tree. God made me a man to sing thee songs, love, and not a man to save thee. 'Tis Robin, I think, or his merry men who will crush this blight in yon branches. But blame it not all upon De Lacy. Harmless, foolish fellow that he is, he would not do thee wrong. 'Twas the cuckoo and his wayward, luckless song.'

She bent her head over him, and her winged mouth was his for a moment before he was still.

. . .

Three horseman rode swiftly through the forest. They came to the hilltop overlooking the silent abbey.

"Wouldst thou, perchance, rather stay here and wait for us, Master?" said Little John.

"Nay," Robin Hood answered.

Will Scarlet, in the midst of his anxious thoughts, recollected how on one occasion his chief had begged them never to ask him to enter the abbey. Little John remembered all things.

The horses found their way slowly down the slope and crossed the river at a narrow place before it flowed into

the deep, silent lake beyond the abbey.

"Perchance 'tis a fool's errand we have come upon," said Will Scarlet nervously. "It may be that Maid Marian and De Lacy, who is a good and honest fellow, have gone to a priest and been wedded. Perchance her father left her money to pay her debt, so that she is freed from marrying Geoffrey and could give herself to another."

"The Lady Fitzwalter loved not that man of idleness

and charm," said Little John.

"Yon grove of trees seems to be clustered about one taller than the rest," was all that Robin Hood answered.

They tied their horses to small saplings by the river and set forth silently and cautiously for the grove of trees and the black lake beyond them, knowing naught to account for the feeling of dread in their hearts.

They came upon De Lacy's body with startling suddenness. The tragic mask of death looked up at them, causing Will Scarlet to cry out in frightened, uncontrolled misery. Little John knelt quickly and put his head to the man's heart. They stood with tense muscles until he said quietly, "He is dead, Master."

Robin Hood looked a long time at the torn earth, the giant yew bending in mock concern over the still body of the man who had so deeply loved Lady Marian.

"This meaneth that our enemies have found this secret out and have waylaid the two," said Little John in his deliberate way.

"We know naught that it meaneth save that death hath come to a good man needlessly," said Robin Hood more sharply than they had ever heard him speak. He strode to the great arch of the abbey and, finding his way into one of the dark corridors, called softly, "Father, father, I seek rest for the night."

After an interminable silence, they heard the distant steps of an old man slowly dragging his way over the stones. He came through a little arched doorway, one hand upon the wall to steady his frail little body, his other bearing a flickering taper, looking as if it bore as little chance to live the night as he himself did.

"Are there other guests here, or can three of us find a bed?" asked Robin Hood, slipping a coin into the monk's withered old hand. "Take this for thy Lady," he said hastily, fearing that this good man might think the money was to bribe him.

"Thou canst find a bed if thou find it thyself," said the old man petulantly. "I have climbed the stairs once already this night for a young man taking his sister to a nunnery."

"Oh, then there are others here!" said Robin Hood.

"Just the young man—Hark! Ye can hear him walking back and forth in the cloister above—and the sister. I could not see her; I am very blind. Her brother said that she was ill. She had a white cloth over her face, and he led her carefully."

"Oh!" cried Will Scarlet sharply. But Little John touched his sleeve, and Robin Hood's quick "Hush" was like the stirring of the wind outside the abbey.

"Thank thee, father. We shall find our way and ask the brother where his sister is, that we may not disturb her. Shouldst thou hear us leaving before dawn, it meaneth we have important work to do on the morrow and must have an early start," said Robin Hood. As the old priest retreated with slow, pushing steps, Robin Hood called after him eagerly, "Thy chapel, father? May I pray before thy Virgin should it be my desire?"

"Aye, aye, stranger. She is thy Virgin as well as

mine."

Little John smiled at his master, whose face had lit suddenly with great joy. Only Will Scarlet looked at his master with a faint disapproval, a worried expression of doubt in his eyes.

"Master, she may be dead."

"Nay, lad, they want her too badly for that."

"But Master, art thou not coming? He who walks above us may be warned—may take her away again."

"Go, Little John, take the lad. Capture the man who walks above and rescue the child Marian," said Robin Hood in the voice of a dream. They watched him sadly as he met their eyes unseeing and stumbled down the open court into the little chapel.

"Little John, he careth not for her fate!" said Will

with a sob.

"Yea, boy, he careth, but he careth above all for his sacred Lady, and he knoweth that thou carest more than he for Lady Marian, so he has given her to thee to

save, given her to thee to take into thy keeping."

The two crept cautiously through the empty, mysterious abbey. In the little chapel below, Robin Hood knelt before the Virgin saint. Tears poured from his eyes, and he prayed to her for strength, saying: "To give up all earthly things for thee, that I may see a united England before I die! To let you maiden's heart cry with pain because of me, sweet Queen, that I may do those tasks thou settest for me still!"

Book the ninth



THE FINAL VICTORY

A ROSE ETERNAL

Little John and Will Scarlet halted at the end of the long dark corridor. They listened to the man's footsteps, his hurried pacing to and fro on the stones. They went forward to where a torch flickered weirdly, certain of attack from whomsoever this was. As soon as the man heard them, he cringed back in the shadows, and whatever Little John and Will Scarlet might have been prepared for, it was not this—Geoffrey of Gisborne, twisting his long fingers and chattering aimlessly, senselessly, in the dark cloisters of an old abbey.

"I tell thee, I didn't do it. 'Twas the little spaniel. Thou knowest, the brown curly pet of Maid Marian. I dug it up, and for revenge upon me, it climbed the tree. I felt its fangs here on my thigh, and I saw its true brown eyes. Always the spaniel and the gold. Ah, yes, the gold," whimpered the poor weak-minded boy. They saw him sink to the floor before a little iron chest and bathe his hands in a litter of golden coins, passing one palm over the back of his hand as if he washed his white skin with gold.

"Where is she?" Will Scarlet said harshly.

Again they were surprised. They expected a fierce stubbornness or the attack of this half-mad boy. Instead he waved his hand toward the tower room and answered disinterestedly, "Beyond."

Little John took the chattering boy by the hand, saying calmly, "Let us go now and take all this gold to

thy father."

"Very well." The voice of Geoffrey exhibited the same monotonous acquiescence. Little John signaled to Will that he must go to Maid Marian himself and then join them below in the grove where the horses were tied, as it was imperative to get the boy away while he was in this obedient mood.

Up the tower steps in three flying leaps! At the door, bursting through, his heart pounding with anxiety for her. And here again he found not what he expected—no maiden sobbing out her fears, no child tired out from long hours of weeping, but a quiet woman who put forth her hand to him in quick welcome.

"Oh, 'tis a terrible time thou hast had, my friend," said Will Scarlet, forbidding himself the strong desire to take her in his arms. "There is still a question in thine eyes, damsel. Is't that thou dost wonder that Robin Hood did not come to thee?"

At once she lost all the poised bearing she had held so beautifully, and tears glistened in her dark eyes. She nodded her head, unable to speak without weeping.

Will Scarlet's heart ached for her, ached for his master, and most of all for his own boyish self. It seemed to be a world of pain and disenchantment, of cross-purposes that kept young hearts from peace. He wanted to take her for his own, but her eyes that questioned him, that asked him to tell her about Robin Hood, kept him from hiding the beauty of his master's spirit, and his words came with amazing fluency so that he spoke like an inspired disciple of the happy Christ.

"He is a man of great vision, maiden, so that moments of life that mean so much to us are denied him. Think of it as denial, sweet, not as something he doth not wish. Long ago, in his sensitive childhood, he saw strange and fearful things, the murder of Thomas á Becket and the pompous King Henry denying that murder. He grew up with a desire to slay the Normans who had surrounded his world with high walls and commands and a lashing whip. His father told him of the outlaw Hereward who had striven to make a Saxon cause after the conquest, who had tried to lead the Saxons back to victory. See, if thou canst, what we, his listeners, have learned to see, a little child thrust into the hates and wars and bitter enmities of a grown-up world. And when he was a young lad, his heart torn with these very hates and burning with a desire to strike, himself to slav with a shining sword the velvet-coated nobles and the false-hearted king, his father died. Perchance thou rememberest what death to a child means! To hear him tell it hath made me know the hopelessness of wanting someone to come back. He forgot all desire to slay. Who was he to kill a man, to bring death with its sudden shock and stark finality?"

Will Scarlet leaned back wearily against the dark wall. He saw that Maid Marian was listening with intense feeling. She smiled at him, an unexpected, whimsical little smile as if to let him know she was aware of his presence. But her voice said, with something of her old imperative command, "Go on, please."

"Thou askest much," said Will with a moment's bitterness. But he shut his eyes to his desire and went wearily and relentlessly on with his story of Robin Hood,

and his voice seemed apart from him as he listened to it—the clear cry of an oracle. Words were given to him, it seemed. They poured forth, and he found that he

spoke of things long forgotten.

"He went to France and lived the life of a monk for a year or so. Here it was that the Virgin smiled upon him. Thou knowest, maiden, in this day what she meaneth to some men. Thy father who didst live in a world apart, the monks in cloisters set apart; true followers of the Queen of Heaven, many of them, yet all only dream-like figures, not for this world of ours. Robin Hood was unlike such as these. He did not dismiss the world of reality, nor did he lock himself in a cloister and don the cowl and robe. He read into the mystery of her smile that has haunted men, fascinated artists, inspired crusades—a message to be merry, to live a full life. he hurried back to England. Thou knowest the rest. He took up a great national cause. Not just the uplifting of Saxons and the downfall of Normans, but a dream of a united England where men are neither Saxon nor Norman, but are brothers who call themselves English."

"But is his heart too full of this to beat for you and me?" said Maid Marian sadly.

"It was on his last great voyage of the night through every hamlet and shire in the land, on his journey of entreaty for Richard's return, that a vision came to him of the Sacred Mary. I tell thee this because I trust thee. 'Twas told only to those of us who belong to him. She spake to him in his secret heart, saying that he would find the fulfillment of his dreams for England if he denied himself the right to all earthly things and worshiped her alone. We cannot know, maiden, what he felt—whether

or not there was a struggle in his heart, whether he wished to drop his tireless endeavors for England's future and turn to such as thee for a moment of blessed peace before he died. But this I say to thee: to worship the Queen of Heaven alone until he dies is the vow of Robin Hood. Thou, if thou desirest, canst look upon that vow as the distorted view of a man bound more securely to religion than he is to life, but to me 'tis the final glory of a man of vision, and fraught with the sternest denial, that must cause his loving heart to ache with loneliness."

"I thank thee, dear friend. 'Tis a mystery made clear. Robin Hood, the immortal; Robin Hood, the great. He is not for this world alone, nor yet has he tried to live entirely in the clouds.

> O equal blending Of earth and heaven, Of man and God!

"Dost thou think that, perchance—," and Will's boyish voice halted in confusion. "O maiden, canst thou ever forget our Robin Hood and give thy heart into my keeping?"

She looked at him in distress, but something her gray eyes saw in his made her keep back the impassioned refusal that was on her lips. Instead, she touched his hand lightly and said:

"I go, as Robin went in time of troublous thoughts, to the far shores of France. The daughter of Queen Eleanor, laughing little Jane, the Countess of Toulouse, has long begged me to be with her. I shall come back when England is less confusing, when Robin Hood's dreams are realized. And some day, Will Scarlet, thou shalt hear the clatter of hoofs in the greenwood, and a

slim young page will come calling for thee. He shall give thee a scarlet ribbon, token of a new love for thee born of an old love for thy master, born of thy loyalty to him and me."

Silently they felt their way in the gray dawn down the steps of the old abbey until they came forth in the courtyard. They went instinctively to the arched door of the little chapel. And here the majesty of a red and flaming dawn fell upon them, and they stood as transfixed as Robin Hood before the statue of the Sacred Mary. She seemed to smile tenderly upon them, and the look of pain and resentment in Maid Marian's eyes faded. And when she heard the voice of Robin Hood murmur joyously "A Rose Eternal," she crossed herself quickly, as she had done so long ago in this very chapel when she and Geoffrey had come to say their early matins at the bidding of her father. With a swift smile of understanding at Will Scarlet, she touched the brown hand of Robin Hood gently.

"Thy dreams are dreams of beauty, Master," she whispered softly, and she was like a child comforting an old and tired heart.

His eyes lit with an expression of tenderness and, with his hand in hers, she led him back into the sunlit world of reality.

The long ride home to Nottingham occupied a reserved and sorrowful forenoon. The chatterings and cries of Geoffrey filled them with horror and pity. Robin Hood had charged Little John to stay behind them, that the body of De Lacy might be brought home in less tragic company than that of this weak-minded boy who had killed him. Maid Marian seemed eager for silence and

meditation. The death of her true friend De Lacy had touched her deeply. Her mind was still a confused maze of thoughts in which Robin Hood's name was like a radiant flame suddenly darkened, and where Will Scarlet was a refuge she could not bear to seek for many days.

They said goodby to her in the Vale of Peace, since she had asked that little Midge be her squire to London. And Robin Hood was gay, and Friar Tuck capered for her eyes alone, and she was carried back to the happy days of her first visit to the greenwood and her first meeting with brave Robin Hood. Only Will Scarlet was curiously moody and depressed, until she smiled upon him at last and said, "Be the merry man that I have always thought thee. I cannot learn to know thee all over again when I return."

"When I return"—those were the words that made Will Scarlet's heart beat joyously, and he cared not that her last goodby was for Robin Hood, that she swayed a little like a soft white rose as she turned her sweet eyes toward London, toward the far shores of France, toward the laughing Countess of Toulouse. A new world, that she might learn to miss her old one without pain; a new life, leaving her young heart and its desire behind.

They took the chattering Geoffrey to Nottingham Castle with half the treasure and the message of Lord Hugh found at Newstead Abbey.

The great castle, deserted of all its guests of yester-day's feast, was a dreary sight of confused untidiness—clashing ribbons of harsh colors in wild disarray, flags torn from the wall and hurled into the center of the halls, overturned furniture, spoiled food, and, in the refectory, Sir Guy of Gisborne and his men lying over the great

tables, deadened with the sleep of wine. It was into this ugliness that Robin Hood strode leading the pale, wild-eyed Geoffrey, who twisted his hands as if washing them in gold, and muttered, "The fangs of the spaniel! They touch me. The face of De Lacy! The eyes of De Lacy are the eyes of the spaniel, and the gold, always the gold!"

"Why dost thou bring my son tied to the end of a rope like a sheep being led to the market place?" stormed Sir Guy of Gisborne, rising unsteadily to his feet to con-

front Robin Hood.

"Listen to thy son," were Robin Hood's cold words. It was then that the father became aware of the strange chatterings of the boy confronting him, saw his twisting hands and the remarkable pallor of his face.

"I did not do it -nay -'twas the spaniel -he struck

or I struck —but the gold —always the gold."

"What hast thou done to my boy?" cried Sir Guy of Gisborne with something besides terror in his voice.

With that the weak Geoffrey seemed to rouse himself, and with a queer stealthy look in his eye lurched forward with his frail hands clenched over the head of his father. Guards sprang forward and held the twisting, fighting frame.

"Thou hast used thy witchcraft upon him," stormed Sir Guy. "By Heaven, thou shalt perish—die here, or worse, be thrust into the dungeon with this chattering boy to learn to chatter with him."

Robin Hood surveyed him with cold, unmoved eyes.

"No witchcraft save thine own has touched the boy. The carelessness of his upbringing, his dark heritage, have caused this fearful thing. Send thy boy away to the far-off sunny places where no cloud of treachery, of

deceit, of disloyalty to England can taint his soul, and he will come back to life. Come back, perchance, with a fine, clear mind that will help undo the work of wrong his father hath already done."

"Take him away," Sir Guy of Gisborne moaned. And then, striving to regain his voice of command, said, "Take this man! Throw him into the dungeons."

But none stirred. No guard dared to touch the cold, pitiless Robin Hood who looked into their disloyal souls with eyes of scorn.

"I have brought with me gold to discharge the debt of Lord Hugh Fitzwalter. His daughter, Maid Marian, hath been told to go on her way, freed of any debt to thee, since a message from Lord Hugh states that this treasure more than pays his debt to thee. The sheriff and his notary are to come here. An order in thy name hath gone to them. They will be surrounded by a dozen of my men, so that they cannot escape if they suspect there is something strange about this business. Thou art to order them to write off the debt of Lord Hugh's daughter to thee."

Loud were the protests of Sir Guy, but his guards refused to stir to his aid, and Robin Hood and his little body of men waited coldly and disinterestedly until the sheriff came.

"What meaneth this?" said the sheriff joyously. "Is't that thou hast caught him at last?"

"Nay," answered Sir Guy weakly. "Draw up a document stating that Lord Hugh hath paid his debt and that his daughter is freed from me."

"What, thou coward, thou hast let Robin Hood fool thee again? But not for long. He is in the most

impregnable castle in England. Let him but try to

depart," cried the sheriff.

"Impregnable, thou sayest?" said Robin Hood with a gleam of humor in his eyes. "Even now one hundred men wearing Lincoln green are entering through doors thou knowest naught of, doors of the earth opened to our eyes alone."

The outlaw chief lifted his horn to his lips. The horn that had blown so many times to the terror of Sir Guy and the sheriff, that had sent its imperative echoes through the forests, now sounded in the emptiness of the great castle. It reverberated through the long corridors and came back to them in long wailing notes of disaster. They heard the sound of many feet coming up from the depths of the castle, hurrying footsteps like rats scampering up from the dark earthy dungeons to the light. The sheriff and Sir Guy hid their faces in horror. last defense was gone. Not even in the great castle of Nottingham were they safe from Robin Hood's men. They signed and drew up as many papers as he wished. but they scarcely knew what he asked them; and when he had gone they were amazed to see that he had demanded naught save that for which he had come, the signing off of Lord Hugh's debt. And certainly he had left them a great sum of gold, for there it was before them. more than the correct payment for what had been owed.

"We must leave this place," shivered Sir Guy.

"I charge each of ye never to repeat a word of what ye have seen, on peril of your lives," ordered the sheriff to the guards, who had fallen against the walls like spineless rag dolls.

"But Earl John must know," moaned Sir Guy.

"Nay," cried the sheriff with more conviction than he had ever used before. "None shall know. The King would behead us both should he dream we had not guarded this castle. We shall set men to work at once to seek the underground entrance that must lead from the caves of Castle Rock, and no one shall breathe a word until John becomes king without danger of ever having to give up the throne. Then we shall order Robin Hood killed and none shall ever be the wiser."

"What of the ransom for Richard? Is it really to free him?" asked one of the sheriff's men.

Sir Guy roused himself, and a little color came back into his pale cheeks. "The diet was held in Germany and pronounced the ransom sufficient, and they have set the date for his release for three weeks after Christmas, which thou knowest is but a bare two months away."

"Then he is to be freed?" the sheriff's voice was a hoarse scream of unbelief.

"Nay, nay, the king of France and Earl John, as soon as they learned of this resolution passed in the imperial diet, feared they could not complete their design of making John the king without any chance of losing his position, so they sent messages to the Emperor offering him seventy thousands marks of silver if he would but prolong Richard's captivity another year, or one thousand marks of silver for each extended month of captivity, or one hundred and fifty thousand marks if he would deliver Richard into the hands of the king of France and Earl John alone. Word has not yet come, but undoubtedly the Emperor will break his word and, tempted by at least one of these three wondrous offers, will at least hold Richard until he can do no harm."

The sun went down that night with a burst of glory in the west. It flooded the little room in the castle at London where Maid Marian lay with her burnished hair against the ivory hand of Eleanor of Aquitaine. It came into the dark castle of Nottingham and turned the spilled wines into pools of blood, and lighted the sleeping faces of Sir Guy's men, who had drowned their fears in drink. It lighted the Vale of Peace where one hundred men gathered round a roaring fire listening to the songs of Friar Tuck and the brilliant humor of Robin Hood.

"I shall sing thee the Will of the Dying Ass," cried the friar, and proceeded to act out this amazing song:

Soon the ass stood up and thus, With a weak voice dolorous, His last will proclaimed for us.

"To the magistrates my head, Eyes to constables," he said, "Ears to judges, when I'm dead."

And then, after giving forth the tongue of the ass to wives that scold their good sires, and the skin of the ass to the fat ecclesiastics, and his simple open face to a monk, Friar Tuck ended dramatically:

He who saith this testament
Will not hold, let him be shent;
He's an ass by all consent.
La, sol, fa,
He's an ass by all consent,
La sol fa mi re ut.

And for some time after, until the friar cut another caper, they repeated in curious harmonies and idle melodies, "La sol fa mi re ut."

"I have heard a very good tale on the obedience of wives," said Peter Clifton shyly, and they all were very still, knowing that the boy had never told a joke before and was trying to do his share toward making the evening of that long, sad day a merry one for Robin Hood. "A group of men long married wished to test the obedience of their wives, and they agreed to ask the ladies to count up to four, and whatever lady did so without showing temper, jocoseness, or refusal, would win the bet for her husband. So they went to the abode of Robin, whose wife was named Marie, and the husband said before all. 'Marie, repeat after what I shall say.' 'Willingly, sire.' 'Marie, say, One, two, three, four!' But by this time Marie was quite out of patience and said, 'And seven, and twelve, and fourteen, I suppose.' So that husband lost the wager, and they went next to the house of Maître Jean, whose wife, Agnescat, liked to be thought a high-born lady. Jean said, 'Repeat after me, one, two-' '- and three,' said Jean's wife disdainfully, so lost him the wager. Then Tassin tried and said to his dame, 'Count one!' 'Go upstairs,' she cried, 'if you want to teach counting. I am not a child.' And another said, 'Go away you: you must have lost your senses,' so that all men lost their bets, and -I say thee, Master," Peter ended his story with a rush of relief, "there isn't an obedient wife in the world." And that last remark was so quaint, coming from young Peter Clifton, who scarcely spoke to a damsel if he met her, so shy he was, indeed, that they all laughed uproariously, and patted him upon his slender shoulders until he nearly choked.

"I would play at wishing games," said Will Stutely dreamily.

Robin Hood, with one of his teasing smiles, began to speak in French, which he knew aggravated the curious Will, who did not understand that liquid language of beauty:

Je suis ici levant les yeux En ce haut lieu des attendens, En convoitant pour avoir mieux Prendre la lune avec les dens.

"What is that thou art saying, Master?" cried Will impatiently.

"Something to go with thy wishing, lad," answered

Robin Hood, "and here is the English version:

Even on this lofty height We yet look higher, As nothing will satisfy us But to clutch the moon.

"And who would not wish for the moon?" said Will Scarlet dreamily. "Like a gold coin." He shivered, thinking of poor Geoffrey.

"Like a red-faced farmer facing apoplexy," sighed Friar Tuck unromantically.

"I've never seen the man in the moon," said Peter Clifton. "Where is his chin?"

"It isn't a man. 'Tis a hunting dog on its haunches," said David of Doncaster.

"In Wakefield we called it a dog, but we saw only its head and pointed nose," said George o' the Green dreamily.

"But let's wish," persisted Will, like a stubborn child that will not be distracted from his small idea.

"I wish for gold," said one.

"That meaneth," said Will eagerly, taking the responsible position of explaining the game, "that thou canst have *only* gold, thou knowest, and not happiness or any other good thing."

"I wish for happiness," said the next, who had little

imagination.

Will looked at him in scorn. "Canst thou not think of something for thyself? That was mine."

"Travel," said another.

At last it was Will's turn, as Robin and Little John and the older outlaws had drifted off into the shadows, tired of the play.

"I wish for a wishing jacket," said Will triumphantly. They looked at him in amazed surprise.

"Why, that isn't fair," cried one.

"Just what doth it mean?" asked the boy with little imagination.

"That I can wish for all the things thou hast wished for at any time I wish and get them," said Will Stutely loftily.

They said they did not want to play that game longer, 'twas not at all fair, and besides, Will knew about it before.

So they drifted off to their beds, yawning and shivering a little as they left the warm blaze of the fire.

"We'll have to be moving into the caves soon," said

one of them.

"We are not going to the caves this year, I have heard," said another.

"What? Live under the open sky? Who told thee?" cried Will Stutely.

"I'd better not say," retreated the first speaker.

"I'll ask Little John," said Will with his customary vigor. "Oh, Little John, Little John, I say, come hither. We've a question to ask thee, and we can't sleep a wink unless thou wilt tell us the answer."

Little John came to them and looked down at their shivering boyish forms huddled together under the

great trees.

"Is't true, Little John, that we aren't going to the wonderful caves this year? I was lost in them once," added Will Stutely boastfully. "We'll freeze here under the open sky."

"Nay, 'tis not true. But those of ye who go must go alone, for Robin Hood and I are to stay in Sherwood. We are going to build more little cottages like the embowered house in the Vale of Peace."

"But why?" persisted Will.

"The Master prophesieth that Richard the Lion-Hearted is coming to Nottingham to lay siege to the castle. He wisheth to be here in Sherwood at the time, that without suspicion we may go to the King, as outsiders of Nottingham, and offer our aid. And we can lead him through the cave entrance to the castle, should his siege from the outside of the walls fail. If we had to come from the sandstone caves 'twould be far more awkward. Our approach would seem like an attack, and before we could reach Richard, we might be slaughtered like wild animals. But none of ye are asked to join with us in this battle against the people of Nottingham, for we know that perchance lives will be lost, and 'tis indeed too much to ask of ye.'

"Thou thinkest we won't fight for Richard and for Robin Hood?" cried Will, jumping to his feet and stamp-

ing in fury. "Comrades! Are ye going to sit by a snug fire in the sandstone caves while the rocks are hurled at the castle walls and fiery torches flame at night and battering rams crash? Little John, we are not children just because we are the youngest in the band. We are the brave outlaws of one Robin Hood."

"All right, brave outlaws," said a laughing voice. And Will Stutely hung his head shyly as he saw their master come upon them, handsome and courageous, laughing and yet tender of these younger members of his band whom the older men had indeed kept young by spoiling them and sharing with them only happy things. "Go to sleep, and in a fortnight we shall have tiny huts ready for you that may keep out the worst of the winter storm."

"I do not like the idea of building in the Vale of Peace," said Little John. "It taketh away the view we have always held of life in the open greenwood."

"Aye, often I feel as thou dost, Little John. But 'tis wrong to cling to the same things forever. Changes must come, if we are to do different and mightier things. We can tear the little log huts down when summer comes again."

"'Tis strange, Master, but I cannot look forward to future days any more," said Little John. "I see only tomorrow, and perchance another tomorrow. 'Tis a feeling of foreboding, Master, that thou and thy merry men cannot forever withstand authority and law and protection."

"Think not sad thoughts, Little John. Life can promise thee no more than tomorrow and, perchance, another tomorrow. We would have little adventure if we knew the number of days allotted us, if we knew the outcome of our little lives."

"And what dost thou truly think of the promise of

Richard's release by the imperial diet?"

"That it is certain," answered Robin Hood. "No matter how great the prizes offered by King Philip of France and Earl John, 'tis too late. The Emperor, no matter how sorely tempted, will be afraid to break his word. I look for Richard in January—a cold, grim, month, Little John, that we hope may be lit by the fires of victory. Lion Heart hath suffered enough. May his invasion of his own England be but a brief affair! Then let his enemies disperse and die, and let the birth of a new England end the need of an outlaw Robin Hood."

"What, thou meanest to disband?" cried Little

John, shaken from his customary calm.

"Nay, Little John, but who can tell what life holdeth? We can be sure only of tomorrow, and perchance another tomorrow."

"I cannot help it, Master, it doth sadden me—the ending of old things," cried Little John. "I feel that thou knowest something thou dost not speak of to me."

"Nay, Little John, our hearts are one, even as they have always been," said Robin Hood with his winning, happy smile. "Sleep, friend. Sleep away thy care and meet dawn as happily as I shall meet it, knowing that our dream is nearing its fulfillment. Richard will return, and thou and I shall help him capture Nottingham."

So the two close comrades lay down to sleep, and Little John fell into a fitful slumber. He dreamed of an arrow pinned in a blood-red heart, and he awoke crying, "Robin, our hearts are one." He saw his master's face smiling back at him, and heard his gentle voice soothing him, "Sleep, Little John, all is well."

He did not know that Robin Hood's hand had wakened him, tearing at him like a frightened child in a nightmare. Robin Hood, afraid, had wakened from his own deep slumbers by a cruel stab in his heart as if an arrow had pinned itself there. Long after Little John slept, his master lay quiet, breathing short, quick breaths, afraid that the pain in his heart might come too soon—too soon for his dream's fulfillment.

TOGETHER AGAIN

An interlude of peace and companionship came, ending the time of confusion that had reigned since Robin Hood's departure for the Saxon Witenagemot. Days without ending or beginning, December like another November, crisp and bright, laughter to grow fat upon, and laziness born of content.

They all tried their hand at the builder's trade, but the work went very slowly.

"Midge—Midge, thou art driving the post in upside down," cried Little John in quiet despair. "Look, boy, like this."

And Midge's sensitive mouth quivered, for did he not always do the wrong thing the wrong way at the wrong time? It was too much to bear. Why had he not been made a clever man like his father who ran the great mill of Nottingham? Sighing profoundly, he turned the post the right way again.

"I tell thee," said Little John, touched by the boy's confusion, "thou and Will Scarlet and Friar Tuck shall go to Farmer Timothy and ask him if he and his sons wish to help. 'Tis a time of year when they have little to do, and perchance they would be glad to earn an extra wage."

The three dropped their tools with a speed that seemed to indicate willingness and relief. Will Scarlet stopped to wash his slim white hands in the little cold lake.

"I want to go too," said Will Stutely, his round face filled with entreaty.

"Very well," said Little John, and smiled to himself as he saw plump Will tearing off after the others, crying; "Wait! Oh wait for me!"

Robin Hood worked harder than all the others together save Little John. He directed and planned, and they found that he was as sensible in practical affairs as he was in matters his mind alone directed. He measured distances with an accurate eye, lifted great logs, and was here and there and in and out every moment of the day. His strength and youth seemed to have returned. His outlaws were to remember him long after as he was during this happy month. He belonged to them alone.

Farmer Timothy and his three awkward sons returned with the carefree outlaws, more eager to see how Robin Hood's band lived in the forest than to earn the extra

wage offered them.

Friar Tuck was the most restless of them all these days, now jolly, now strangely full of big words and sentimental eulogies. He would stand beneath the oak trees that they were going to cut, and striking an attitude, his short arms crossed upon his chest, would cry out:

"Wait, brethren, before ye cut yon oak. Ye can judge where to strike and do so at once, but 'tis hardly the courteous thing to do. Should ye be struck down by the sword unwarned, unaddressed, ye would feel some grievance. Speak to the tree. Pay it the tribute its strength and beauty deserve. For aught ye know, 'tis as human as ye are."

And Farmer Timothy and the three peasant boys thought that Friar Tuck was a very strange man indeed to talk of the ordinary trees of the forest as if they were as good as men and as if they had feelings.

Little John and Will Scarlet worked steadily on, regardless of the fat friar's discoursing, but the younger members were only too glad to halt and listen to his philosophies, and Midge had a new picture that he carried about with him in his sensitive young mind—that of trees that were as beautiful and splendid as living things, so who knew but perchance they felt and thought as did human beings? He found himself liking not to work alone in a part of the forest, lest this rustling of dried-up autumn leaves meant they were trying to say something to him. 'Twas really too much for Friar Tuck to ask—that they talk to the trees—he thought. It frightened him to see their stark shapes at night silhouetted against the sky.

And in the month of December, instead of snow flurries and ice, came strange weather indeed; crisp fall, and then suddenly a few days of almost Indian summer warmth, ending in a fierce thunderstorm, unseasonable and fearful in its unexpectedness. The outlaws awoke from the dead of sleep, aroused by the ominous rumble of distant thunder. They gathered together under the shelter of the thick trees, wrapping themselves in the animal skins they kept for coverings at night. Midge and Peter stood shivering convulsively, their slender bodies huddled together. Peter's legs were like those of the sandpiper, two stiff little stems, quite bare. Suddenly he left Midge and flew to the strong arms of Little John, cocking his head to listen to the rushing wind.

"It's coming again, Little John," he wailed as a flash of lightning blinded them. And he was right, for the roar of the thunder was upon them even as he spoke, making even the hearts of the older outlaws beat faster. As the lightning lit the surrounding forests, they saw the trees bent double, the splendid graceful saplings that Friar Tuck had praised so highly a few days before, now torn into splintered ribbons before the onslaught of the wind. Peter was weeping in choking, shivering sobs, but he sat upright, his eyes fastened on the grotesque scene before him—the bending trees, wet, driven leaves, and strangely lit pools of water.

"What art thou thinking, little lad?" said Robin Hood to Midge, who sat with his chin in his hands and

his great eyes wide open and staring.

"I was wondering if the pine tree would be standing up next time," said Midge calmly, and they could but laugh at his cool attitude toward the strange phenomena of the storm.

The next day was cold and damp, and the outlaws felt a dead and dragging weight in their bodies that was the aftermath of the stormy night before. No one had slept enough, and all felt cross and tired and discouraged with the building of the small shelters in the Vale of Peace.

And as they scattered to the various places in the grove to do the particular tasks set them, it so happened that Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, and George o' the Green toiled together. They had worked silently and somewhat ineffectually for about an hour, when three keepers of the forest came upon them. They carried long swords at their sides, and each carried a bill of the forest to give authority to his word.

"Welcome! And how likest thou the weather?" said

Robin Hood without lifting his eyes from his task.

"We are the keepers of the king's deer," retorted one of the three loftily.

"Really!" said Friar Tuck, taking out upon these keepers some of the anger he felt at having to chop wood all day.

"We are keepers of the forest, and wish to know what ye are doing here?" they repeated. "Hold, in the name

of the king."

"But perchance we like not thy king," said Robin Hood. "And is he not only an earl?"

"If 'tis a fight ye wish, our blood needeth exercise,"

said George o' the Green.

"We be content, thou bold outlaw," they answered him, and all three drew their swords. "But before we fight," cried one of the keepers, "let me tell thee our king is the true king, Lion Heart. We worship not thy Nottingham monarch who is but an earl."

It was an exhilarating battle. It was long since the outlaws had had a play at swords, and longer still since Robin Hood had fought a mock battle with men of the king. Well matched they were, but soon Robin and the friar were short of breath and fighting with less accurate thrusts than their enemies.

"Hold," cried Robin Hood with his customary sporting spirit. He knew when he was done, and saw little sense in denying his defeat.

Friar Tuck and George o' the Green obeyed their master instantly, and as the three keepers liked not the idea of striking dead three men who were no longer defending themselves, they too lowered their weapons.

"Thou art men of excellent worth," smiled Robin

Hood.

They smiled under the praise, and one of them said eagerly, "Come to the Blue Boar Inn at Nottingham

and let us drink a health to each other. Perchance we

can try our luck at swords another day."

"Nay, I like not the public inn. 'Tis too gay a place for an old man like me," smiled Robin. "I like mine own hearth. Come with us beyond you cliff, and in a little embowered cottage we shall pour thee ale as good as any in the land."

The three keepers hesitated a moment, for as soon as they saw what a good loser their opponents' leader was, they had guessed with whom they dealt.

"Thy name is Robin Hood?" asked one of the king's

men shyly.

"Aye, a good enough name," laughed Robin, "one that thou needst not fear, I promise thee."

So over the cliff they followed the outlaws that they had just defeated and came down into a great vale between three hills and a small lake where one house stood, and where many men worked over similar shelters that were in the making.

"Art thou starting a rival town here?" laughed one of the keepers.

"Nay, we are building shelter for ourselves, that we may be near at hand should King Richard need our aid in his attack on Nottingham."

"Thou thinkest there is a chance the good Lion-Heart will return?" cried one of the keepers.

"Aye, we expect him in but a few weeks' time," said Little John, who had left his work and come up to greet the newcomers.

They went into the cottage and, beside a roaring fire, drank ale such as no inn in England served, and they heard the songs of the merry men and saw a display of such companionship as they had never dreamed could exist.

"And thou sayest Richard is thy king," said Robin Hood. "There are not many keepers in England who think thus."

The eldest keeper turned to Robin Hood with glow-

ing eyes and began to speak:

"Thou canst not blame men, nor yet canst thou forgive them quite, for turning against Lion-Heart. There are hearts in the world that beat for those near them and those who seem to guard them. Earl John is that figure, certainly. Whereas Richard hath spent scarce a month in England since his crowning, John hath never left the soil of the land he desireth, and though he guards only in the sense of a watchdog always in view of the world, that maketh an impression upon simple minds. But there are those of us who have been given an intimate glimpse of Richard, seen his lion heart, his stern adventurous daring that is indeed selfish from the point of view of England. He hath endeared himself to us through the magic of his person, the romance of his long captivity, and his dauntless fight against the pagan. The sheer force of his will, once felt, holds."

"Then thou hast seen the King?" asked Robin Hood with interest.

"Nay, but I have heard of his deeds, how after he was first crowned, he went at once to Rouen to release the queen mother, Eleanor, from the prison there where the old King Henry had kept her for a decade. 'Tis such things endear a man to hearts as simple as mine."

"Aye, he hath done things indeed that capture a love from us that endures in spite of all the disappoint-

ments he serves us after the moment of joy," said another keeper.

"Thou knowest something more of Richard?" asked Robin Hood gently.

"They have told me, a father, the tale of my son at Acre in the battle led by Lion-Heart. The King was on a scaling ladder, leading all the others, my son behind him. Arrows were all about them, but the angry King heeded them not. The enemy, seeing his blind fury, pushed from the top of the wall a bowlder that would most certainly have crushed him had not my son pulled him bodily from the ladder and taken the punishment of death for his bravery. Those who saw have told me that the King lifted my boy in his arms and carried him back of the lines, and that he did no more fighting until the lad was buried and a mass ordained for him."

"Thou art right. Such deeds are never forgotten," said Robin Hood gently.

The keepers bade the outlaws farewell long after the moon had set, and Robin Hood and his merry men chuckled to themselves as they remembered how the king's keepers had first encountered their evening's host.

Another day dawned like unto those gone before, but as the outlaws toiled in the crisp air, their hands weary of plying the ax and their spirits low because of this task of building they were so unused to, the three keepers appeared from the forest and quietly began to help them.

"Why, what is this?" said Robin Hood, coming upon their guests of the night before.

"Oh, 'tis a nice day to be in the open, and we like thy company," smiled one, casually lifting the heaviest log of all.

"And as long as this is really a task for the King, that thou mayest be near him should he need thy aid," said another, "we, as the King's keepers, should surely help thee."

"'Tis but a moment's pastime," said the other, as if

he had stopped to pick flowers beside a stream.

"Very well," laughed Robin Hood, but his heart was glad that they had cared to help him. And such workers as they never before were seen. In a sudden spurt of endeavor the task was done. Five more snug cottages, each of them as large as the one already standing, had now been completed, and there was room for one hundred men to find warmth and cover in the face of approaching winter.

"And now for jollity," cried Friar Tuck, starting to lift his robe for a caper, but letting it down quickly as the cool wind struck his blue limbs. "Gooseflesh all over me!" he moaned. "I am ready to enter the cottages

at once."

And enter he did as was always his wont when he made a suggestion, and many went with him to lie before the great hearths and watch the blue flames turn to gold, and the gold to blue again. They listened to Robin Hood's words—the dreamy recountings of the fat mayor of Shropshire who had wished to join his band, the rich colorful memories of other worlds than theirs. The firelight changed into far-off battlements, the Cathedral of St. Michel, Canterbury bells, the green and dangerous sea of the north.

"I wish I could go," murmured Midge, his eyes as bright as stars.

"Go where?" said Little John mischievously.

"All — everywhere," the boy replied, seeing in swift succession the priest of France, the fishermen of Whitby town, the shining armor of the king's soldiers.

The long bleak month of December went by. As Christmas day neared, there were a few snow flurries that whitened the ground and then turned into wet, melting slush, so that all was monotonous grayness again. The days were now so cold that the outlaws came in from their hunting trips red-nosed, and blue-lipped. and so aching with numbness and chill that they were impatient with one another. Robin Hood built the roaring fires higher in the little low houses and praved that Richard would soon return. The outlaws were beginning to look forward to Christmas day, to make trips to the town, returning with bulky packages beneath their cloaks. Nicholas and Friar Tuck had long discussions on the art of cookery, and many gentle hints were dropped as to the favorite dishes of the band.

On Christmas Eve the outlaws snuffed out their candles early, but soft footsteps might have been heard many times during the long night, and the figures fleeting quietly from cottage to cottage told of plans for a happy morrow.

At dawn they arose and went to the main room in the embowered cottage, and there Friar Tuck read them a mass, and they sang with curiously stirred hearts the Christmas hymn that Robin Hood had taught them long before, a song of beauty. It had a more special meaning since they had heard Robin's strange confession of his devotion to the Virgin. Singing the song was like telling the story of their master's love for her. They felt her beauty and her mystery as they had never felt them before.

The Father seeing
Our ruin cruel,
Brought into being
Out of the thorn-tree,
Out of the rose-tree,
A Rose Eternal!

But they were not serious for long, nor did Robin wish them to be. He had come to cherish these days when they laughed and sought carefree happy hours with him.

"Master, come to the fireside," they called. And he spent most of that long Christmas day beside the roaring flames that any might come to him who wished, those tired from their play at wild rough and tumble games, tired from eating the roasts and spices and drinking magic wines that Nicholas had made for them.

Christmas broke the stretch of peace. Word came soon after that Richard was truly to be released in a few weeks, that the emperor of Germany had refused the bribes of Earl John and the king of France, and that the word of the imperial diet stood.

Now came that period of waiting for Lion-Heart's return that stirred every heart in England, that drove men to other lands in fear of the time when the savage beast would spring. "A leopard unloosed," they cried in terror, for many had aided Earl John and sworn fealty to him, thinking Richard would never return alive. Queen Eleanor, with the curious aloofness that characterized her whole family, said no word of reproof to John for his treason and did not stir herself to make ready for Richard's coming. In silence she waited, armed by her position and pride, and none knew what she truly thought.

And the outlaws in the forest heard only those strange, unreal reports of their king's activities that came to all England, and the period of waiting was unendurable to them. It seemed as if the winter would pass without their seeing the King, for he was not finally freed until the end of January. It was the season of fierce storms, and no ship dared to bring the traveler home.

"The King waiteth at Antwerp," said the messages. None knew whence the messages sprang or how they crossed the sea. They came from the small, skulking vessels that carried on the merchants' trade in spite of disaster and threatened death, came on the lips of men who cared not what became of the monarch of England, even as the word of God is carried by profane voices to the distant lonely spots of the earth.

"The Emperor of Germany is trying again to kidnap Richard, thinking he hath let him go at too cheap a price."

Whence did this cry come? None knew, but they talked of it round fires in ancient castles, round tables in the public wine-houses, in the monasteries, on the highway, in Robin Hood's camp.

"He is at Antwerp, starting homeward in the galiot of a Norman merchant named Alain Tranchemer, having heard of the Emperor's treachery."

And, marvelously, these things were so. Queen Eleanor with her guards set forth for Dunwich to meet him. He came from the galley wrapped in great cloaks, attended by those men who loved him still, De Longchamp, the Bishop of Rouen, the Earl of Leicester, and the Bishop of Salisbury. He had no word for the dowager Queen. His lean and pointed face was drawn into lines

of anger and fierce unrest. His sharp beard made his head longer and more picturesque. He was like a shrewd, energetic animal, alert and impatient for his prey.

London and shouting and singing. London greeting her dishonored king as if he had been away at war or on a long visit. Such is the quick and careless change of human emotions. Perchance they remembered he had been in prison for half of his four years' absence, perchance they forgot it on the wave of excitement that his returning caused.

Men who had brought him back were heard to murmur that the emperor and the duke who had held him prisoner would never have given him up so easily had they known his people longed for his return thus ardently. And who knew that England did want him back? Who was to judge their true emotion by this frenzied shouting and adulation?

Richard gave not his heart easily. The first glad greetings died when, three or four days after his crowning, he gathered his armies together to set forth to Nottingham, the stronghold of Earl John, that dared, even now, to resist him. Perhaps he was glad of this chance to attack, this day of tempestuous display of his authority. Before he set forth, Queen Eleanor spoke with him, and those who watched saw the curious wonder of the likeness of these two as their two wills clashed in argument. Whatever they discussed, it was Eleanor who smiled triumphantly, who closed her dark eyes in weariness as if the struggle with Richard had been too much for her frail strength.

And the highway from Nottingham northward was dark with figures who dared not oppose Earl John and

yet dared not oppose Richard. But Robin Hood stood in the bleak forest with a smile of happiness on his lips. His dream was nearing its fulfillment. The town of Nottingham was slowly emptied. The ladies of Norman heritage were driven to castles in neighboring counties. The cowards fled. Those who wished to aid Richard made their way to Sherwood Forest to join Robin Hood, who had sworn in front of many to help the true king in his siege of the fort that stood against him. And the walls of Nottingham Castle reared themselves Within the castle hundreds of men paced restlessly up and down the stone corridors. Guards patrolled the dungeons, watched every opening in the rock. They explored, yet found not the subterranean passage into the caves that had been used by Robin Hood's men to enter the castle one previous occasion. The sheriff and Sir Guy sat in the high tower with Earl John. All three were pale and silent. An atmosphere of gloom pervaded the whole stronghold. They were willing to fight because they feared to do otherwise. But they were undecided, even their leader, Earl John.

What did he want? He bit the nails of his soft white hands, and his handsome face wore an expression that was not fear or hate or anything save a vast puzzlement

at his plight.

At last they saw the roadways cutting into Nottingham darkened by lines of soldiers, and the King came riding to demolish the stronghold that withstood him. And he who had wished to be king stood in the high tower with a look of bewilderment on his face looking down at the impending foe, looking down upon his ordered doom.

THE SIEGE OF NOTTINGHAM

He who had commanded the hordes against the heathen-Lion-Heart-he who had run bareheaded and singing into the arms of death bearing with him Angevins and Poictevins, Normans and Saxons, Scots and Welshry at Acre, now headed another army at Nottingham. Tawny-headed, lean, and mocking he crossed through lines of men, he set them to gathering great stones, hauling scaling ladders, hurling bowlders. He taunted them, shouted at them, and made them turn upon him like fierce, hot animals unable to bear his unreasonable demands and the thankless tasks he gave them to do. He sang to them, praised them, rushed into the face of almost certain death to carry their dead back to the groves beyond arrow range from the castle, and they loved him and followed sobbingly after, to die for him in battle.

And Robin Hood found himself wiping the dust from his eyes and watching the amazing figure of the King as he lifted fallen banners, urged the drummers to beat louder the tune of insistent, pressing victory, sent his messengers for more men, and continued his tireless activity. The chief of the outlaws felt the glory of this cold, strong warrior whose heart broke loose from its chains of iron, so great was its passion; so that even those who hated him could not but be inspired by his magnificence. And more men came, dark lines of them from neighboring towns, bright companies of them from

London town with glinting lances, enameled helmets and shields, bright-colored surcoats, and fluttering pennants. Armored knights, jongleurs in motley robes, priests, cavalry, varlets, sappers, cross-bowmen guarding rumbling carts laden with camp equipage, and men in Lincoln green that caused even Lion-Heart's eyes to sparkle when he learned who they were. And the undistinguished masses of peasants who had withstood Earl John and had crept back to fall under the spell of the true king, those Saxons whose forefathers a century earlier had lost the pride of their race, felt a new power as they fought on the side of England's monarch.

And the first day of the siege passed, a breathless close-packed day of grief and ardor and destruction on both sides of the wall. Night came, with the grim castle of Nottingham taking on a new aspect, symbol of struggle and famine and war, even as it had been a century before.

Within the castle walls, the strangely-assorted group of artisans and ironmongers, armorers and smiths, tailors, butchers, and those few brave housewives who had gathered supplies to prepare for a siege of many days, tried to give each other's strength a rest that their hold of the castle might continue unchallenged until the end of the armies outside. They saw through the casements that King Richard's men were armed with axes and flaming torches as they rushed through the streets of the little village. They watched their homes go up in flame, and fathers thought of their children who tramped the highways waiting until the siege ended that they might return. They would return, but the city that greeted them would be only destruction and misery.

Earl John in the high tower felt no sorrow that his stubborn resistance had caused the destroying of the good men's homes in Nottingham. He watched the display below with the same look of intent amazement that he had felt ever since the first sword was raised. War in England! War because of him! It gave him a curious feeling of importance.

But Richard had a gibbet raised, and against the background of scarlet flames three captured men were hanged, their bodies clearly imprinted against the red glow like black dangling branches of a tree. Then a shivering sigh swept the castle from those guards who patrolled the underground dungeons and were told what had happened, to the men on the walls whose eyes were blinded with horror at the actual picture. Richard, who knew what to do to drive his meanings home, Richard, who flung pictures of horror before their eyes that they might know he meant them to understand horror unless they surrendered!

But the soldiers of Richard could not scale the walls of this singularly impregnable castle, and the second day he gave the order to construct a mine beneath the walls. So peasants and sappers were set to work in all haste to try to dig a great chamber. But almost at once they were driven forth by the rapid attack of men within the courtyard who detected their presence. They stayed bravely in the mine, filling it with all they could lay hands upon and setting this afire, hoping to weaken the wall so it might crumble more easily at the point of their battering rams.

"Come away." It was the harsh command of Richard. But they knew that he was not angry with them, but only sorely puzzled that the resistance of these few men who had clung to his brother, Earl John, held so sternly against his fierce onslaught.

It was as if the spirit of William the Conqueror had lingered in the castle of Nottingham, built by the invader so long before. The dogged, relentless attack that had brought the French into England never to be wholly dismissed, seemed to have been born again. Here was the same grim antagonism, a senseless opposition that must give in if only by the means of starvation for those within the castle. But to King Richard, who wished for a sudden and striking defeat, the delay of such a siege was unthinkable. Restless as he was from long days of imprisonment, he longed for harsh and terrible battles soon done. Instead, the second day of a losing attack ended!

All night the varlets and laborers worked upon two siege engines, huge poles hung on pivots between massive uprights, with stones piled beside them for the engineers to use in loading the slings.

The final day of the siege dawned—but to Richard, who knew not the certain finality, it was but the dawning of the third day. Hardly was the sun above the horizon when the attack began by a hurricane of stones from the vicious engines. But it was soon apparent that even with this sterner equipment, Richard could not win the battle unless some new device or trick was evolved. His men slipped on the ice-covered moat and were sent back by the onslaught of lighted torches and Greek fire hurled over the walls at them. Within the castle every man and woman was fighting. Stones and burning pitch were hurled at the invaders.

It was at midday that men saw Richard stop in his singing, commanding, cursing, crying activity, saw him turn impatiently to a man of his own height, not unlike him in appearance save that Richard's beard had no streak of gray in it as yet. The stranger seemed as hot, as covered with pitch and dust, as the King himself was, yet he seemed somehow curiously aloof from the whole battle, like an onlooker who had suffered attack along with the others. They saw him kneel before Richard unconcernedly as if it were not in the midst of a great battle, as if stones did not fall upon him even as he spoke.

"I am Robin Hood, and I have long lived in the caves beyond the castle. From the dark underground I have learned of a secret entrance into the fort, perchance cut by William the Conqueror long ago, perchance only the whim of nature to defeat man's boast of the impregnable castle. Should we be able to enter the castle by that subterranean path, Your Majesty, the castle must surrender, for fire within and out, onslaught from both directions, would be overpowering."

"Why didst thou not tell me of this before?" said Lion-Heart with his abrupt, ungracious manner.

"There are those within the castle who are aware that I know of this passage. This meaneth that the dungeons are patrolled by many men. The passage is so small that only one man at a time can come through. We should have been moved down like blind animals, walking straightway into the sword."

"Aye—a goodly reason indeed," mused Richard. "What makest thee think we can effect that entrance now?"

"I think that many more villagers have died than we are aware of, that many less are able to fight within the castle. Since two days have passed without our entrance through the caves, they must think that Robin Hood did not join in the siege of Nottingham. They have, perchance, removed their guards, or at least some of them, from the dungeon. I am willing, Your Majesty, to lead any who will follow me into the castle."

He was surrounded by men so quickly that King Richard looked at him in jealous amazement.

"Thou shouldst have been the commander of this siege," he said shortly.

"Nay, Your Majesty, this is not my leadership. These are but mine own comrades who have surrounded me, men that I have lived with for many years and who hate wholeheartedly those dignitaries of Nottingham shut up in yon tower, and who look to this revenge with personal eagerness."

"I would come with thee," cried Richard impetuously. It was Robin Hood's turn to command. He looked at the King and said very clearly, "Nay, Your Majesty, thou must live for England, and the Saxons."

"What meanest thou, the Saxons? I have ceased to think of them," said Lion-Heart with careless mockery.

"They have not ceased to think of thee," cried Robin Hood with singing fervor. "Twas the Saxons of the land who gave the gold for thy ransom. 'Tis the Saxons of the land who have withstood Earl John. Think not lightly of those men whom thou callest serfs, for they it is who have never ceased to call thee king."

And the proud, stony-faced Richard stood still, half ashamed of his remark about the Saxons. He

looked upon Robin Hood in amazement, and made no move to follow the slim outlaw who disappeared, followed by his hundred men, into the dark beyond of Castle Rock. He felt as if he had relinquished his command to another, something he had never done before.

And this the King and his men saw from withoutthe same relentless opposition from within the castle continuing halfway through the afternoon, and then as suddenly as if witchcraft had opened the rocks that nature had closed, men rushed from the castle. Flames burst forth from the great keep. The tolling of the bell was lost in the frenzied screams of old and young, and what they called was not "Richard," but "Robin Hood." And the King sat upon his horse, an imposing spectator of his siege brought to victory through the aid of the wondrous outlaw. He saw his brother, Earl John, scampering with the others from the castle, not daring to look back at the figures in Lincoln green framed in each casement, holding drawn bows and magic arrows that never missed their mark. And the cry on the lips of the runaways was "Surrender!" And Richard lifted his hand to his armies to take them prisoners. They gladly gave themselves up, a piteous group of huddled, shivering men like hunted animals, dirty and mud caked. perplexed and horrified at their experiences.

And when the flames of the castle had been put out, and the whole of Nottingham was like a heap of dead ashes, save for the stark, grim castle, lonely as death and empty of a king, Richard said, "Bring me that fellow they call Robin Hood."

But none had seen the brave outlaw since he had burst into the castle like a bird of the night. Men

hastened to tell the King how the slim hero had fought single-handed two stalwart guards until his men had joined him. And prisoners told how they had felt hands upon them as they leaned out of the windows to hurl stones upon the enemy; had turned and faced the flaming eyes of men in Lincoln green.

"Twas the surprise that beat them," said Earl John. "They think of Robin Hood as one who is immortal, as a phantom, a mysterious hero who knows no bounds, no defeat. He comes through stone walls, walks out of locked dungeons, swims deep moats, climbs stark walls, and he sings the song of Richard and the Saxons until the peasants are changed into arrogant men, thinking that to be a Saxon is to be an Englishman."

"Silence," cried Richard to the sneering Earl of Mortain.

And soon the decree of Richard as to the fate of the officials of Nottingham was made. The sheriff, the bailiff, and all manner of small men in unimportant positions were sent to the prisons at London town. Sir Guy and certain Norman nobles were assigned to the Tower itself.

"And I—I am to die at dawn," said Earl John with a cynical smile at his handsome brother. "Or perchance to be thrust into the lion's jaws and crunched!"

"Unfortunately we have a mother who is stronger than a lion," said Richard grimly. "That lady of mystery and age, Queen Eleanor, and curiously, our mother, hath wrung this promise from me—that you, John, her youngest, shall have forty days to consider what to do, whether to oppose me further, or whether to retreat a decent interval until my death, when the throne shall be yours, I imagine, though thou art not its rightful heir. But all that is beyond me, beyond the wall of the grave that I do not seek until some time hence. Go from me, and shouldst thou desire to join with Philip of France and call me into battle, I will fight thee gladly. But thou shalt not live on in England following the words of the sly companions thou hast gathered about thee. Thou shalt not defy Richard again on his own soil."

Earl John shrugged his graceful shoulders and bowed

in mock reverence before the King.

"I suppose I should thank thee that I am not in the dungeons of thy prisons or in London Tower with Sir Guy of Gisborne. But somehow 'tis my mother I should thank, methinks, and not my wondrous brother that the whole world praises."

"Good will is in my heart if thou desirest forgiveness,"

said Richard coldly.

"And I think I know what I shall do," continued John as if he heard not his brother. "I think thou knowest what mine actions will be. In forty days thou shalt receive my avowed apologies couched in splended terms, beautifully signed by mine own hand. I know when 'tis best to retreat."

And retreat he did at that moment when he had aroused Richard to such anger that longer acquaintance with his brother at near quarters was dangerous to his life.

"Ah, yes," muttered Lion-Heart, "he knoweth when to retreat. He stayeth always on that side of the wall that suiteth him as long as safety attendeth him, and he mindeth not the need to change suddenly to the other side if safety be there for him. I have rescued England from him today, but he saveth himself that he may hold it tomorrow."

The King turned to his armies and told them to aid the villagers in building shelters for the night. He told his guard that he himself would sleep in the castle, and that at dawn he wished to set forth to Sherwood Forest with a small company of men to seek the outlaw, Robin Hood.

Nottingham was a strange and ghastly sight. Pale torches flared all that night up and down the winding streets, in and out of the ruined houses.

"Twenty livres my house cost, and there is naught but its hearthstone left," cried one fat burgher. "Simon's horse and new cart and signpost for his butcher shop are lost, and even the little church of St. Mary's is partly burned."

They walked the streets like disinterested passers-by, like traveling merchants surveying a demolished village and taking what they could to sell again.

It was Little John and Midge who could not sleep that night in Sherwood Forest for thinking of the sufferers at Nottingham, and the two crept back to the village to cheer the wandering souls trying to find their homes in the dark heaps of blackened rubbish. They worked tirelessly, helping the refugees build rude camps for themselves and saying that life must go on as before and a new village must grow from the ashes.

At dawn, men and women from neighboring shires and hamlets came hurrying along the muddy lanes to view the disaster of Nottingham. They were eager for details of the siege, and viewed the King's men who patrolled the streets with eyes of fear and suspicion. In the ruined market place women huddled together waiting for their men to return to them and tell them the extent of the damage wrought. All night some of them had stood with expressions of dumb misery on their faces. Now, as they saw their friends from other towns, tongues were loosed and a querulous babbling arose that was more pitiful than their silence.

"I saw a swallow come down my chimney a fortnight ago. I knew it could mean naught save ill-luck for Jerome and me," cried one fat dame, wringing her hands

hysterically.

"My house is but a hole in the ground, and my field

a swamp," cried another.

The townspeople walked about aimlessly, stopping before familiar objects to greet them with meaningless remarks:

"My pewter jug, all bent and twisted," sighed a voung matron, holding her squire's hand a little tighter than before. "Why, Matthew, there is the stool thou wert carving for me, quite safe and untouched!" She clasped it eagerly, and the two went on down the darkened street with the salvaged stool between them, a

grotesque and useless object.

Against the wish of Robin Hood, Midge had persuaded Little John to come to Nottingham with him. outlaw knew that the miller of the little town had suffered the greatest loss of all, since, though he had fought on the side of the King, his mill had been burned nearly to the ground in the siege. Robin tried to dissuade Midge from going in search of his father that night. young as he was, Midge had a curious strength of purpose, and he and Little John had gone to Nottingham in the cold and wet in spite of their master's wishes.

To find some special one in the crowded streets was nearly impossible, especially since all along the way they were stopped by pathetic weeping children lost from their parents, and were forced to retrace their steps many times after aiding them. Midge ran here and there, a pale shadow, searching each face in the dim light, unable to find his father. As dawn came, cold and miserable, he put his hand in Little John's and said wildly, "Take me to the mill, Little John. My father has perished with it and is lost in its ruins."

This was the last thing Little John wished to do, for he knew how sensitive the boy was, and he feared lest they should come upon the miller lying dead beside his mill that was the work of a lifetime. But there was something in the imperative command of the boy that made the older man obey him without protest. They left Nottingham, neither of them turning his head to look back at the ugly ruin.

"Perchance these rebels of Nottingham will become sensible now," said Little John.

The roadway was curiously empty. With the light had come a full realization of the wreckage the siege had wrought, and men with a fierce eagerness were already attacking the beginnings of their new homes. Across the hard, frozen fields to the remains of the mill went the two outlaws, feeling as though they were the only living people in that part of the countryside. Faint blue tendrils of smoke curled lazily up from the dead ashes that surrounded them. Midge kicked sullenly at the pieces of charred wood. He seemed filled with a

bitterness quite new to his loving nature. Little John

watched him with anxious eyes.

The miller was not in sight. "He is dead," thought Little John, with a heart sick with pain for the boy. Midge left him to run on ahead, a swift-footed, soft-eyed doe seeking its fawn. To Little John's amazement, out of the burning hole of the mill came the miller. Covered with smoke and grime, he managed to smile through his gloom and, opening his arms wide, clasped his son closely to him.

"I have come home to thee, Father," whispered

Midge.

"But thou hast no home," said the miller. "I have had much to offer thee in the past, little son, and thou hast not been near to share it, and now that I have nothing, thou hast come to me. Impractical as ever, I see he is, sir," said the miller with a helpless, loving gesture toward Midge, his eyes on the wreck of the old mill.

"I think, Midge, thou shouldst ask thy father to come home with thee," said Little John.

"Wilt thou, Father? Wilt thou come to our forest home and be with Robin Hood and Little John and me?"

The miller looked helplessly at the ruin behind him and at the sweet-faced, grieving boy. He surveyed uneasily his smoked apron and old grimy shoes.

"Why, Father, thou wilt wear Lincoln green," said Midge, sensing that the old man felt he did not look

well enough to go before the famous Robin Hood.

"But I could not be an outlaw," the miller said earnestly. "I know not how to shoot well at all. I 'faith. I could never hit a deer. Methinks thou hadst better

go back, Midge, where they can take care of thee. I'll find a way somehow."

It was Little John who saved the day, taking the old man's hand and saying gently, "Thou needst not become an outlaw. Visit us awhile, even as men in Nottingham must needs go to their neighbors in other towns until their homes are built again. The outlaws of Robin Hood will aid thee in reconstructing thy mill. And, indeed, Midge is a man of some property himself, since Robin Hood's booties are divided in equal shares. He can aid thee. And in the meantime thou canst laugh at the pranks of the merry men and of thine own serious little boy."

"I am a little boy no longer," said Midge. And it came to Little John with a start that indeed the boy was more than a child. But his straightforward, innocent soul seemed curiously untouched and pure beside those of older men.

The three went northward to Sherwood. The miller smiled at Midge and, over the boy's head, the eyes of Little John and the father met understandingly. A strange scene this, indeed—a young boy leading a staid and proper citizen to be an outlaw. But it did not seem funny or even odd to them. So men adapt themselves in times of stress to situations that they have never dreamed of before. Nottingham was a center of new and firm relationships born of necessity and good fellowship. Small jealousies had burned in the fire, pride and hate had fallen with the castle walls.

When most of the companies of the King marched forth to London town, they left behind them an ordered village of men working with fierce and healthy energy in the building of a new town. As John had stood in the tower and watched the dark lines of soldiers pour into Nottingham four days before, Richard stood and watched the gay banners, prancing horses, and weary armies leave. No expression marked his face. His features were set into the same stern, unforgiving mask as when he had landed at Sandwich after his four years' absence. The three days of battle had fired him for a moment to a semblance of that tawny, lion-hearted figure that had fought at Acre. Battle and bloodshed! Was he made for that alone? Was it not in him to sit upon a throne and wear a crown idly, rule a nation without dragging it onto a battlefield? He knew only that the thought of the rest of his life in London wearied him. There would be spies at his throat, politicians demanding of him new policies—what did he think of this or that? And what did he think? Of the Saxons, for instance, that this amazing outlaw, Robin Hood, upheld. He had forgotten they might be of importance in the making of a kingdom. The thought fired him with romantic ideas. Why not push the Saxons out of their lowly positions of servitude and see what they were worth? It might be an amusing trial—anything better than wearing a crown and doing what he was supposed to do.

"Your Majesty," a soft voice broke in upon him.

He whirled angrily about to see a demure little maiden with bright hair and wide gray eyes regarding him.

"Who art thou? Be gone, wench. I have no moments of talk for anyone. Years in a prison have taught me silence. Be gone, I say."

She turned from the soft little maiden into a small angry kitten ready to claw at him, he felt, if he allowed

her any nearer. Involuntarily he backed against the wall as she hurled her impassioned, angry words at him, feeling almost as if he admitted defeat in not rushing her from the room. But how could he? It was she who was rushing, an indignant feminine figure attacking the King.

"How darest thou? I am a lady and doing thee a favor. Is this what thou art truly like? Then the words of thee are all lies—that thou lovest ladies and that thou hast a gentle soul beneath thy warring aspect. Only a lion after all, with a loud roar that is not for ladies to listen to." She stopped with quivering breathlessness, but as he opened his stern lips to speak, she flew at him again, a bird dashing her pretty wings against his heart of stone. "A king that does not have a gentle word! One who loves only the blood of battle and the roar of rage! Thou shouldst learn a little from a true king, Robin Hood, who hath a heart of nobility though he weareth not a crown."

"Your pardon, damsel," said Richard, with the same fleeting smile changing his cold, stony features into an expression of vigorous beauty. "Why didst thou come

here, may I ask?"

"Certainly I'll pardon thee," she said a little more calmly. "I came to tell thee that Queen Eleanor's post waits below to hear the outcome of the siege and to ask thee to say whether thou hast kept thy word regarding Earl John."

"Faith," said the King, clenching his fists and turning into the cold contemptuous warrior again. "Is't not enough that I have obeyed Madam my mother, but that I must make her aware of it at once, and that

she must send her post after me to see that I am still alive? Is mine own post not good enough?" he shouted at the little maid.

"I know not and care not," the damsel wept. "Thou shoutest-shoutest like a lion. Hush! I will not be shouted at by thee, even if thou art a king. I'd sooner be addressed in the gentle tones of a Robin Hood."

"Who is this Robin Hood, and what dost thou know of him? 'Tis easy to see thy heart beats lovingly for him. Has he many ladies as sweet as thou thinking he is a hero?"

"Oh," her pale cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed with concern, "thou hast misunderstood. No ladv save the Heavenly Mary has aught to do with Robin Hood."

"He is a monk?" cried Richard in amazement.

"Nay, nay," she said. And then she launched into the favorite story of every young man and maid in England, the praise of Robin Hood.

"He hath the strength and cunning of thyself, Your Majesty. But he liveth a life of peace in the greenwood. and hath never been known to kill or to allow his men to do so. He is more pure than any Galahad, and his love for the Queen of Heaven is something that is rather of poetry and beauty than of religion. That is, he doth not lock himself in a cell because he worships the Virgin, as most young men of France and England do, but seeketh joy in sun and shadow and taketh life lightly. as he thinketh she doth wish him to do."

"But he is an outlaw, which meaneth that he must have killed or committed treason at some time," said the King.

"Nay. He became an outlaw because he wished to be like Hereward and oppose the Normans."

"A traitor then," said Richard grimly.

"Oh, how canst thou say that, when he loveth thee above all things in life save his own outlaws and his Heavenly Queen!" she said with indignation.

"But thou hast just said he loved not the Normans," persisted Richard, but he leaned forward eagerly to hear her answer. It was very long since he had found anyone

who professed to love his name at all.

"I have not said it rightly," sighed the maiden. And then, as if trying to explain a most difficult lesson, she began slowly, "'Tis something like this, the people say: Robin Hood doth want England to be a great nation. and he thinketh it cannot be one so long as the relationship of master and serf, of Norman and Saxon, exists. He hateth not the Normans, but he hateth the Normans' position. He wisheth the Saxons to lift their heads from their long century of humility and find an equal place with the French. He calleth the new race that shall emerge from these two, English. He loveth thee because he sayeth that thou art just and strong in thy domineering, warlike way. He hath aroused all the Saxons to love thee, if thou wilt have them. If thou flingest this chance away, there will never be an England, for the next king is John, who will build up another Normandy. Robin Hood believeth that thou wilt build an England that is a nation of strength and unity, so that John can do no harm when he is king."

"And where is this fellow? What of his stealing and his open defiance of the law? Canst thou justify that too?"

"He needeth not justifying," she retorted. "He doth but borrow back from nobles what they have borrowed from Saxons, and he keepeth none of what he taketh, but helpeth the poor and needy with it. His outlawry is only warring against the sly injustice of men who have plotted against thee. If thou hadst only the sense to know it, he is thy greatest friend." It was with this fiery remark that the maiden came to her right mind again. She sank into a bewildered little heap at the King's feet. "I have called thee names," she whispered—"said that thou hast no sense! Oh, art thou going to hang me?"

The King laughed loudly. He took her soft white hands and helped her to rise, and, looking straight into her frightened eyes, said: "Robin Hood must be greater than a king to make thee forget a king. I shall seek him out, maiden. Nay, my dear, do not look so frightened. I shall not do him harm. 'Twill, perchance, be a pleasure for us both to discuss the future of this kingdom together. I have not forgotten all that thou hast said, and I am more than curious to see the fellow whom all England fears and loves. I thought him but a gross and ruthless bandit warring upon my people. I see that he is a man with a rare and lovely soul."

She went from him quickly, turning her small head to see him once again, and, meeting his eyes unexpectedly, was thrown once more into a flush of confusion. She half raised her hand to wave at him, and then, as if remembering he was a king, dropped him a most graceful curtsy and ran at a reckless pace down the stone steps, perchance to tell her friends in the courtyard below of her meeting with Lion-Heart.

He found himself smiling at her. What scorn she had poured upon him! What love and reverence she had for Robin Hood! He called loudly his steward.

"Doth not the tale go that this fellow Robin Hood often weareth a disguise and playeth his pranks unbeknownst?" asked the King.

"Aye, Your Majesty."

"Dress a company of twelve men in the robes of monks and friars, and bring me the dress of a bishop. We shall start for Sherwood in an hour's time," said Richard.

ROBIN HOOD MEETS THE KING

It was a bright, clear day, a contrast to the wet misery of the siege. The sky was the deep blue of early spring, and the fleecy white clouds seemed almost to belong to summertime. Robin Hood's band were glad to come out of the little cottages where they had been forced to stay most of the last two winter months.

"I feel more like an outlaw now," said Peter Clifton in his quaint, thoughtful manner. "In there I felt like a country squire sitting by my snug fireside, eating good food, drinking good ale, and vastly content with myself. Outside I long for adventure and wish to climb the treetops and to lie on the ground and see the blue bowl of the sky come down and cover me."

"Here," laughed Robin Hood, "none of that. Thou canst think of lying on the cold ground, Peter, but see that thou dost not do it. We do not want to hear thee cough and sneeze the rest of the winter. But thou art right. This curiously bright and blue sky hath made me feel as if spring had come. As for adventures, I always long for them."

"Master, Master," they heard Will Stutely call, and looking heavenward, saw he was on the topmost branch of a giant pine halfway up the hill beyond. He was almost lost in the rich green foliage, but his rosy cheeks were like bright apples catching their eyes.

"Didst thou like the blue sky so well thou didst go up to see it closer?" laughed Little John.

"Master," Will Stutely said, after tossing a handful of pine needles upon the last speaker, "I see coming along the road twelve monks and a well-fed pompous abbot clothed in rich display. Art thou going to let them go on their weary way without asking them to stop for meat and drink?" he asked with a small grimace of delight.

"Nay, ask them to dine!" said Robin Hood with a returning wink.

So Will slid down quickly and in a trice was off through the bare groves of the forest.

Thus it was that, as he neared Sherwood, King Richard was stopped, much to his surprise, by a short, plump fellow with rosy cheeks. It did not occur to the King at first that this fellow was one of the very outlaws he was seeking, until he sensed an undercurrent of suppressed excitement in the boy's voice.

"Good abbot, we are preparing a feast for the refugees of the town of Nottingham. There is so much good ale going to waste, and so many of the king's deer! Wilt thou not join us as our guests?"

"Thank thee, thank thee," said Richard, ordering his guard to accompany him and putting on what he hoped was a pious look.

So it was that the King was led into the presence of Robin Hood wearing a disguise that none could penetrate, even as Robin Hood had so often entered places where men knew of his fame yet could not tell that this was he.

Robin Hood came briskly forth from the embowered cottage and confronted the proud abbot sternly.

"Abbot," he said, "I am bound to rue such knaves as thou, living in pomp and pride. Hast thou passed through the ruined town of Nottingham and given not of thy gold and rich garments to those miserable refugees there?"

"I thought that thou didst ask us kindly to share a meal with thee," replied the abbot in a rich and musical voice. "We are the King's messengers, and thou hadst

best not speak to us so insolently."

"God save the King!" said Robin, "but such as thou, who pretend to worship him and who live idle, slothful lives instead of joining in kingdom-building, should go down to dwell with the departed. Yea, death upon all those who deny the King!"

"Then death to thyself," said the abbot, "for I

have heard that thou art a traitor."

"A traitor to such as thou, but a loyal subject to Lion-Heart," said Robin Hood. "Perchance I should tell thee my chief spite against the clergy. 'Tis that friars and monks and such as thou wear fur and jewels, drink ale and eat rich food, and the word of God is forgotten and the poor suffer, and all that thou shouldst do is left undone."

"But I have never spilled the blood of gentle deer who range the wood, nor followed the hawk and hound as thou dost," said the abbot piously.

"Let us not talk upon our own faults and virtues,"

sighed Little John, yawning with boredom.

"Nay, Little John is right. Come and taste of our greenwood cheer, now that thou hast accepted our invitation."

Richard felt some misgiving as to what would constitute "greenwood cheer," but the whole situation so amused him that he gladly followed the outlaws into

the great hall, at the end of which a roaring fire invited his attendance.

He saw that busy hands had taken the horses of his men into tents, and that boys were already carrying the animals food and drink.

"Why is it we are treated so well if thou dislikest our calling?" said the abbot in the rich deep voice he used when he forgot his pious mimicking.

"Thou art the King's messenger, thou sayest. I think that we shall even leave thee thy gold, though the people of Nottingham need it right badly," said Robin Hood. "For good King Richard's sake I would do much, and thus I would do much for Richard's men."

The outlaw went busily about the task of making the fire roar, and at last he put his horn to his lips and made it sing—full, sweet notes that called gayly to the outlaws to come. And from the forest raced the men, scampering, dashing, jumping, and skipping, only to kneel reverently before their master in the midst of their kitterings. They bowed their golden heads and the firelight gleamed on their brown, smooth faces, and King Richard's heart was dull with momentary pain that such devotion as this belonged not to himself. Men had bowed before Lion-Heart and men had been quick to worship him, but never had he seen such deep humbleness, such unaffected love.

"The court may learn of the woods," he murmured.

Then in came fat Nicholas, the cook, and following him the boys of the greenwood bearing great roasts and steaming puddings; venison, fowl, and fish from the river; and Will Scarlet following still after with great bottles of shining, colorful wines, and Friar Tuck pushing with the help of his own groaning, a barrel of ale, stout and heavy.

After they had eaten and heard the jokes of many outlaws, Richard began to wonder if Robin Hood would really forbear taking his gold. He seemed to be royally entertained at every turn, and half suspected that now at the end of the great feast it would be his own turn to furnish the play. But nay, Robin Hood turned to his outlaws and said, "Bend all your bows, and with the gray-goose arrows show such sport as you would before the King."

Archery touched with magic, archery that was an art, even as window-staining and wood-carving was an art. And finally they brought forth the golden arrow that Robin Hood had won from the sheriff of Nottingham and asked their master to show his skill.

"Ye have cleft so many wands yourselves, brethren, I cannot outdo ye," the Master smiled. But he took the golden arrow lovingly, surveyed its silver tip, held it a moment aloft that they might see its grace and beauty. Then putting it into his bow he turned suddenly and shot the beautiful thing into the flames.

"Oh,"—it was a quick sigh from every outlaw there all of whom had admired this prize above any ever brought into the camp. But they had learned to wait for their master's explanations. Every eye was upon him, and the most interested of all was the abbot with the beautiful voice.

"'Tis the only thing left of the sheriff of Nottingham and of the reign of Earl John. I send it from me to melt in you flames even as rebel hearts have melted in the white fire of Richard's anger."

"Wouldst thou serve the King if thou couldst?" said the abbot suddenly.

"I serve the King now. Dost thou think I need to live in his gay court? Dost thou think that I need his praise or blame or threats to spur me on to follow him? Only I sometimes wish that before I die I might have Richard's pardon for my outlawry. Perchance I have not been wholly right in taking these brave men away from the towns of England where they would have been blood and bone of the nation. But I did that solely that men might see our love for Richard and for the England he will build for us."

"If I could get thy pardon, wouldst thou serve the King in all things?" asked the abbot.

"I think Richard would know that I had always served him," said Robin. "But whatever he asketh of me, he hath, with all my heart."

The outlaws threw off the hoods that they had just donned before going out into the night again, and turning back, knelt with their master, saying, "All things for the King!"

It was then that the abbot arose, and the twelve monks with him knelt before him as the outlaws knelt beside their master. The eyes of every man in the room turned to the magic figure of the abbot, suddenly transformed into blazing life and vigor. His tawny hair, his jutting beard, the broadness of his body, the magnitude of his personality, they felt it all. And when he opened his lips and sang to them, the world suddenly spun. His notes were like wild, sweet, caroling birds, his song like a hymn. Again it was a soldiers' song of stirring melody. And they all knew that no man in England

sang like this, that no man in England was so like unto a tawny lion with a fierce unruly heart save Richard— Richard the Lion-Hearted, playing a trick on Robin Hood, and singing a song of peace and victory and passionate joy of life for them.

"The King! The King!" they cried.

"Richard Lion-Heart! The King!" sighed Robin Hood.

"Ah, but I fooled ve!" His Majesty laughed boyishly. "I played you a trick like one of Robin Hood's own making."

One by one the outlaws stole from the great hall, knowing that their master longed to speak with the King alone. But their leave-taking was slow, for they looked back again and again at the noble head of the warrior and the thin, intent face of their master. Their hearts were loval to Robin Hood, but curiously stirred at the sight of this new leader, this man that Robin Hood had taught them to love as much as himself. They found that they longed to know him as intimately as they knew their own master.

And when they were alone, these two confronted each other with whimsical smiles. All the serious plans that Robin Hood had in his mind faded, and he became merry as a boy on an adventure. And Richard lost his commanding, frozen manner and became a questioning. interested spectator of the great outlaw.

"And what is this thou savest of the Saxons, friend that they are not the spiritless, colorless serfs I have come to think them?"

"The Saxons are men who have suffered too long," said Robin Hood-"suffered until they are dulled with fears and filled with a contempt for their own inferiority. Thou must have begun to feel something of that servitude in thy long months of imprisonment when thou didst lie like a caged bird in a cell because of another's bidding. Take them, Master, take them unto thee, and thou wilt find that a sterner, stronger England will result. 'Tis the Saxons who will keep the Normans from running too swiftly the race of their own selfish making. 'Tis the steady Saxons who will take the curse off the French temperament of indecision and fickleness. Their stoic, unromantic hearts may weary thee, good King, but shouldst thou be able to stir them, theirs are hearts that will give thee security and peace.'

"But I like not this task of coming home to find weak-kneed Saxons and sly Norman dogs awaiting me. Why should I, the King, have to stir my people to loyalty? Why cannot the English gather about me as

thy outlaws have gathered about thee?"

"The English, thou sayst!" said Robin, his eyes glowing. "Then thou wilt strive for the England I told thee of? Thou carest not for this little Normandy, born of the greater Normandy beyond the sea? Thou wilt mold and beat and rage until there stands here a kingdom that is a kingdom of our own, such as only Lion-Heart can create?"

"Yea, I will fight until I have something here called England," said Richard slowly. "My true desire is for another crusade, but since thou hast put this before me, it seemeth a task of high and holy purpose. Yea, I will build us a land of strangely assorted virtues—compounded of Saxon sturdiness," he mocked, "and French fire," he said with a gleam of pride in his bearing.

"And John will find that his brother hath indeed decided to be king!"

"Why hast thou not stayed in England more?"

cried Robin Hood.

"Faith, I should not be a king," said Richard moodily. "The whole idea of settling down in one spot is distasteful to me. I am haunted by night with scenes of the Crusades; though we took the city of St. Jean d'Acre, the unbelievers still hold Jerusalem. How fast my mind travels—over the dark and treacherous sea where I set forth in a Saracen dromond with one side painted yellow and the other green to hide us from the pirates; the shining scenes of distant coast lines, purple-veiled mountains blending with the sky, and the stark towers of foreign cities, Tripoli, Tortosa, Tyre, Sidon, Scandalion—all of them haunt my dreams. And even as I promise thee, Robin of the woods of England, that I shall have a new devotion for this land I rule, I hear the long calling of the eternal sea, and mine eyes seek the horizons."

Robin Hood had risen and now walked up and down the long hall restlessly. He was like a man seeing the hope of a lifetime snatched from him. Had he known that this moment would come when he found that Lion-Heart could not do other than disappoint him? He told himself reasonably that he asked too much of life to expect another man to cherish the dreams of his own heart. Why should the King care about building an England that would be torn down again the next century by his own kin? And as he fought with himself to keep from crying aloud his disappointment, the King went on, his frozen heart unburdening itself in passionate words that told Robin Hood the truth.

"Must I confess to thee that I did not go on the Crusades out of the goodness of my heart—that the fact that the home of Christ had fallen beneath the yoke of the infidel hardly influenced me? I tell thee I long for strange adventures, new scenes, compelling tasks. I thought when I lay in the Dark Tower that all I wanted was to return to my homeland. I thought my wanderings were over. 'Tis not to be. I cannot find warmth and comfort and safety in this great England. My pilgrim heart will die wandering instead of safe at home."

"Somehow I see that England will still keep thee her King though thou art never here," said Robin Hood. "There is something in thee that hath captivated men's hearts, and what the English once love commands their everlasting loyalty. I see that I ask too much of thee. One man alone cannot build a kingdom. Even shouldst thou stay in London town and try thy best, when death came upon thee, who could say that thou hadst made England? Years must pass, but this may we believe, that when time smooths this seething mass into a nation, perchance 'twas Richard who let the Saxons be a part of the great whole."

"But I tell thee, I know not what to do!" sighed the

King.

"Thou hast already done enough. Thou hast returned in time to keep John from taking the throne too soon. Should he have won, he would have brought about an insurrection of the Saxons by the injustice of his demands, and the golden-haired men of England would be lying by the roadsides. But what canst thou do to quiet thy wakefulness? Is't that thou dost now desire peace of the spirit?"

"Yea, I desire it, I suppose," said Lion-Heart irritably. "But there is so much that turneth me to steel. Men will say that Richard hath no pity or love. There is no room for such emotions, Robin Hood, in such a heart as mine. I am filled with a fierce and burning energy to go to Normandy and besiege those border castles which the French have taken during my absence, Gisors and many others. How can I be still as thou askest me to be? Philip will war upon me. I shall go to Anjou, Touraine—"

"If thou knewest that death might call thee in a fortnight's time, what wouldst thou do then?" said Robin Hood, trying to visualize the restless heart before him. "Wouldst thou not die in England? Wouldst thou not learn peace in the last days of thy life?"

"Nay, nay! I would turn pilgrim but for the excuse of traveling through a hundred different places, colorful and foreign to me. I would seek out those shrines for the Queen of Heaven—and hark, thou of the pure heart, not to worship her before I died, but to have some meaning to my purposeless wanderings—to Our Lady of Alet near Toulouse, Our Lady of the Fountain near Saumur, Our Lady of the Haven at Clermont in Belgium, 'Notre-Dame-sous-la Tour' at the church of St. Peter of Louvain, to Hungary where they have found a statue of the Queen in limewood on the trunk of an oak, to Switzerland and Our Lady of the Hermits."

And the almost senseless array of names that Richard hurled forth was like poetry to Robin Hood. A vast pity filled his heart for Richard, who lived for strife, for activity that was only the outpouring of his own selfishness. Robin Hood, with his sensitiveness to what this other man thought, knew that the King was straining at the leash to be off. So he came toward Lion-Heart and knelt down to him.

"Forget the words we have had together. My dream for the Saxons was fostered out of a loving heart for them, my own people. Go on thy restless way knowing that the hearts of thy people, Saxon or Norman, are stirred by thee, and that alone is the accomplishment of a great thing, since unity of love for thee will give thy people one great bond among them."

And now Robin Hood sprang to his feet, and swinging his horn aloft, called again for his merry comrades. They poured in so quickly and with such sheepish expressions, the two great leaders could but smile.

"Thou hast been peering around corners, Midge," laughed Robin Hood.

"Oh, nay Master," said Midge in a small, shocked voice. "Not really peering—we were but waiting nearby shouldst thou call us."

How the King laughed at the boy's confusion!

They knelt before him and kissed his robes in farewell. Looking shyly into his bold countenance, they carried away with them a picture of his tawny lion head and golden eyes.

"There are too many farewells in the world," sighed Will Scarlet, thinking upon another farewell he had said not long before to a child of Normandy and royalty. He wondered if she would ever return. It was not in his loving heart to doubt her, but as he looked upon the majesty of Richard and the glowing, magnetic leadership of Robin Hood, he felt himself but a pale figure beside them.

"Shall I read him the Book of Kings?" cried Friar Tuck merrily.

"Not if it be anything like the Gospel of Silver

Marks," retorted His Majesty.

"Where goest thou from here, Your Majesty? May we accompany thee or aid thee in any way?" asked

Little John.

"Nay," said the King. "I must needs return to Nottingham for a short council. It must be known by all the county of Nottinghamshire that John, Earl of Mortain, and Hugh, Bishop of Coventry, who was his secret ally, as well as Sir Guy of Gisborne, have been given forty days in which to relinquish all claims on the kingdom and to give up offices they may hold and lands they possess. I go then to Clipstone to meet the King of Scots, and some time in April I shall be at Winchester for another coronation. It seemeth that Richard shall be crowned king many times," he said whimsically.

"Well, thou bird of passage," said Robin Hood, "glad are the men of Robin Hood that thou hast flown this way. Perchance some day thy strong, urgent wings will tire a little and thou wilt come home to us to rest."

And those comrades who heard their master speak thought that he meant Richard might return to Sherwood, but the King knew that the outlaw spoke of England, the England he had sworn to stay away from as long as his restless heart found solace in his wanderings.

It was full moonlight as they came from the warmly built little cottage and the cool air touched their burning cheeks. The night was full of farewells. The stamping horses were brought forth for Richard and his men. They galloped away at once, and the clang of hoofs was loud on the frozen earth. To Robin Hood it seemed as if he were galloping away, for on nights like this on many occasions he and the black charger had gone swiftly over the moorlands. To the outlaws it was like watching a race in which they did not share, and their spirits were depressed. But turning away from the roadside, their eyes sought the lighted doorway of the warm, comfortable hall where they had feasted so merrily that night. And there was Robin Hood waiting for them to return to him. Their hearts beat with a warm suffusion of love for him. The massive figure of Richard faded into the dark night beyond. Life wavered for a moment and then went smoothly on, revolving about the gentle figure in the doorway.

"IN SUMMER TIME WHEN LEAVES GROW GREEN"

"Art thou happy?" said Midge, anxiously peering into the thoughtful countenance of Little John.

"Happy as a marriage bell, lad," said Little John.

"How liked thy father the greenwood?"

"Oh," Midge laughed, "he took it too seriously. Every time we went hunting, he prayed beforehand that he might shoot his share of the feast, and he was afraid to laugh as often as he felt laughter, since he was not sure that such as Friar Tuck were truly teasing. Besides, he hath a conscience, and looketh upon our life as one too idle. He was secretly pleased when his mill was built again."

"Dost thou think our life too idle, boy?"

"Sometimes. When Robin Hood is not with us, our play often taketh on such rollicking proportions 'tis hard to settle down after it. But now what else is there for us to do but play, Little John? Lion-Heart is in no further danger for the present, since John, the Earl of Mortain, hath agreed to withhold further treachery and dareth not break his word. Nottingham is rebuilt and business is going on rightly there under the guidance of a new sheriff, all the troubles of lovely Lady Marian Fitzwalter are settled, and the Saxons of many a shire and hamlet in England are more interested in public affairs than they have been for a century. Our work is done."

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"It almost seemeth so," said Little John, with a small worried frown on his forehead.

"Is that why Robin Hood is quiet so much of the time, thinking upon other tasks for us to assume?" continued Midge with amazing aptness in characterizing the situation.

"I do not know," said Little John arising. "But think not upon it, boy. 'Tis not a matter to be settled in a moment. Play awhile and forget the need of accomplishing things all the time."

Midge stared in surprise after the retreating form of Little John. What a change had come over them since the far-away day when he had opened his sack of meal and blinded the two cleverest outlaws in the land. It seemed as if they had all grown up over night, and regarded their pranks that had filled so many happy hours as insufficient. A wild desire to bring it all back—the recklessness, the happiness, and gay, foolish scufflings and beatings—was in the boy's mind as he sprang to his feet and gave a curious throaty bird-call.

A shrill whistle, a low tap-tapping as of woodpeckers on the giant oaks, and a series of throaty songs like Midge's own, answered him. His quick ear caught the direction of these sounds and he dived into a thicket of green shrubs noiselessly. Robin Hood, who had been lying on the grass not far away, listened to the strange forest calls with interest. They were certainly like unto the very sounds of nature, yet there was a stilted unreality to them that would have convinced him they were artificial and made by man had they been anywhere save in the forest of Sherwood. But they were not following any of the forest signals he had taught the

outlaws. The throaty whistle, half song, half call, had never been used in their summonings, and who else dwelt in Sherwood save his own men? So curious he was, though, at the whole procedure that he lifted himself on his arm and listened more intently than ever. It was at that moment that a lowly grackle directly in front of him let forth the very same throaty call he had just heard, and the outlaw chief, convinced that he had been mistaken in imagining human agencies behind the series of strange sounds, sank back again on the soft bed of moss, his eyes seeking the restful gray of the heavens.

But Midge, jumping creeks, climbing hillsides, stopping to snatch a bright berry to pop into his mouth, stopping to push a cobweb from his face and to leap a hornet's nest, seemed to seek other than bird and beast. At last he stretched his slim body to reach the hanging boughs of a great willow tree and swung himself with a flying leap, by means of the supple branch, halfway up a stark perpendicular rock to a narrow jutting ledge. He crawled along the slippery shelf until he came to a hole just big enough to admit his slim body. His eyes, unaccustomed to the sudden darkness, saw spinning circles of red and green and gold for a moment, and then he found the tiny point of light far back in the gloom that told him the other had come before him.

It was Peter Clifton's frail, delicate features that smiled a welcome to the warm traveler.

"Our secret signal is a blessed thing," said Midge delightedly. "No one ever knows we aren't the grackle fighting the woodpecker with the screeching catbird looking on."

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"'Tis a wonder the Master doth not know! He is very clever at forest sounds," said Peter. "And thou knowest I have not yet been able to give the throaty song very well. I am not used to the forest. I hear still the song of the sea," he ended wistfully.

"But thou likest it here," said Midge putting his arm about the boy comfortingly.

"Aye, as long as Robin Hood -"

"What meanest thou, as long as Robin Hood is here!" cried Midge in fury. "I am tired of this gloom, this prophetic voice of disaster that greeteth me on every hand. I see no difference in Robin Hood, unless it be that he is a little quieter. Thou dost not think that he will go away—or—" the boy's voice faltered miserably.

"Nay, oh—nothing," said Peter glumly, and then said hurriedly, to change the subject, "Why didst thou

send me our secret signal?"

"I have a plan," said Midge.

"For all of us?"

"Nay, for you and me and perchance Will Stutely, and after that for all of us."

"Well, what is it, and why, and when?" said Peter airily.

"If thou wilt not take it seriously, I can get Will

Stutely," said Midge somewhat aggrieved.

"Tell me," whispered Peter, his dark, wistful blue eyes so entreating that Midge forgot his momentary displeasure.

"I think that we should plan things to amuse Robin

Hood."

"Yea, but what can we, the youngest of them all, do?" sighed Peter.

"This is my plan," said Midge. "You and Will Stutely and I shall dress ourselves in the dark cloaks of mysterious travelers, pulling down over our eyes the wide brims of pirate hats that will give us a most sinister expression. We must even put masks over our eves and nose, methinks, so that when we pounce upon Robin he will not know us."

"Pounce on the Master-what art thou saying?" cried Peter in horrified tones.

"'Tis all part of the plan," Midge insisted with a disgusted air. "You and Will and I are to play at kidnapping him. We shall come suddenly forth from the thickets and snatch him up from the grassy bed he lieth on all day."

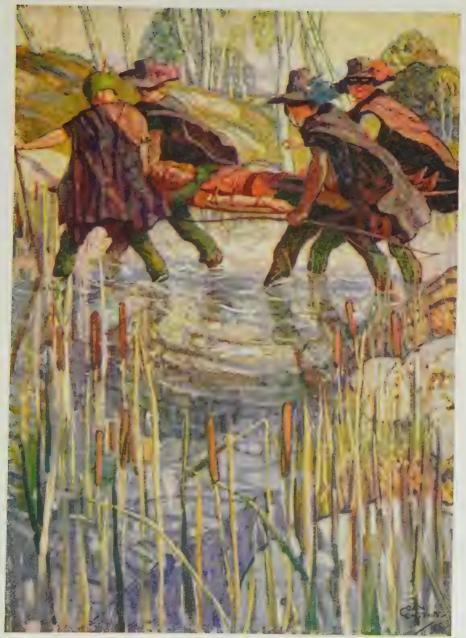
"And where shall we take him to, once he is kidnapped?" said Peter discouragingly. "I see little fun in all this, Midge. How can making our Robin Hood captive cheer him?"

"Oh, hush thou!" cried Midge. "Still thy gloomy heart, Peter! This is to be a right merry play for all the outlaws of the band. We shall take him -"

At that moment a low crackling of twigs made him stop suddenly his discourse. He leaned forward and whispered the rest in Peter's ear.

A smile broke over their faces, and they laughed joyously, quickly stuffing their kerchiefs in their mouths so none outside the rock might hear them, and to keep the hiding place a secret. Peering slyly over the ledge of rock a little while later, Midge saw that whoever had been there had now gone away.

"Come along, Peter, 'tis safe now," he called in an undertone. And soon their bright golden heads were



Robin Hood felt himself tied in a bundle of uselessness

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like sun disks moving swiftly against the gloom of the dark forest.

* * *

For several days Robin Hood had noticed an odd air of confusion when he came suddenly upon any of the outlaws. There seemed to be whispered conversations that stopped in mid-air at his approach. He thought little of it, however, as he had accustomed himself to giving them absolute and unquestioning freedom in all they did. But the fact crossed his consciousness more than once that something was afoot among them.

The master of the outlaws lay on this particular afternoon on the mossy heights of a little stony hill overlooking the Vale of Peace. The sultry stillness told of early afternoon when man's eyes are heavy with drowsiness that must be given in to, for the sake of comfort. Robin felt himself falling into that state of half reverie midway between sleep and wakefulness. His dreams were distorted fancies with a touch of reality for their foundation. He saw swaving figures, slender and white. brooding over him like quiet nuns, and, starting out of his dreams, found only the rows of birches bending in the breeze. So it was when he heard a curious throaty song, he told himself with drowsy pride 'twas but a grackle calling its mate to play, for had he not heard that very same odd sound a few days before? There was no need to open his eyes to see whence came the gruff little carol. He was aware of a passing darkness across his eves. Perchance it is a wood-sprite passing by, he mused, a shadow before the sun. Nay, that was what they said of him, and this was not he that passed. Or

perchance it might be Little John tiptoeing by—perchance—he could not think. Heavy, irresistible

sleep closed in upon him.

He felt himself awakened rudely. With a feeling of anger he opened his eyes. The early afternoon sun was still bright and dazzling. The scene before him was unreal, impossible. Four small sprightly figures in dark capes with black wide-brimmed hats pulled low over their masked eyes, were lifting him onto a sort of litter they had made to enable them to carry their burden more easily. He struck forward with his two fists simultaneously, catching one of his captors with a neat blow beneath the chin, but missing the others entirely. And this was to be his last chance at them. They were upon him with less gentle hands at once, and he felt himself tied in a bundle of uselessness, with arms and legs bound beneath him, and his mouth gagged to muffle his shouts. He listened intently for any careless word that would tell him who his kidnappers were. He was not afraid. It would be almost impossible to get him out of the forest without attracting some of the outlaws. There was that curious sense of familiarity about the whole proceeding that often comes with a dream. For a moment he almost laughed to think the visions of sleep could so convince him. Of course it must be a dream! But even as he mused thus whimsically, he suddenly knew it could not be a dream, for dreams allow no thoughts. They are simply living pictures, and certainly he was thinking at a swift and breakneck speed. His brain whirled as he tried to keep every part of himself ready to note any laxness on the part of his captors. He heard the low murmur of a command from one of

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them. To his increased bewilderment, the almost voiceless phrase was couched in Saxon terms.

He noticed as they carried him that two of them were slightly built, and tired so easily they had to take turns at their end of the litter, while the other two marched stolidly on as if the weight of his burden was unimportant to them. It was with a start of amazement that he saw they knew the forest. They went forward with a careless ease that bespoke a knowledge of woodcraft and long acquaintance with the strange byways of Sherwood's glades. Here they crossed the brook at its narrowest spot, and now went a roundabout way through the glade that no ordinary passerby would have chosen, and this kept them from passing the edges of Cathedral Lane where Robin Hood's men might have loitered. The outlaw saw with a sense of misgiving that he was being kept cleverly out of the reach of any of his band. Was this strange beating of his heart a sudden sense of fear? His hands moved beneath the binding ropes, but he found that it was impossible from his defenseless position to reach his horn. And now, characteristically, when the first edges of fear that any man who finds himself in a helpless position feels had passed, he chuckled to himself. He, the cleverest and most elusive outlaw in England, taken captive while in his own secret glades! He who had passed through locked doors, swam moats, found openings in closed caves, escaped into the wilderness and found his way home, was unable to escape now from the most familiar spot in the world. He thought he saw an exchange of glances among his four kidnapers as he laughed. He almost imagined for a moment that they too caught their breath in laughter.

And they stopped at once to bandage his eyes before they went farther, as if they distrusted his ability and wished to handicap him in every possible way to keep

him from escaping.

But even with his enforced blindness he sensed where they were going—up the thorny, bramble-covered hill beyond the creek that babbled incessantly as a woman, and that they had called "Shrew's Bath"; over the field of daisies that led to the open road—a road that led to Nottingham should you go south upon it, to Doncaster if you went north, and should you cross it, you would come upon the amphitheater of Sherwood, that crescentshaped piece of ground overlooked by a high cliff whose jutting rocks were like the man-made tiers surrounding any jousting ground. Robin Hood's heart beat a little faster as he mused upon the way his captors would goto the south, Nottingham—to the north, Doncaster across the road to one of his own groves where many as strange a scene as this had been staged by his own hands. He almost decided it had to be north, since all his enemies in Nottingham had been disposed of after the siege, and as the crescent-shaped field beyond was merely a blind alley, unsuited either for escape or hiding place.

Perhaps he was wrong. Perhaps he was not in the daisy field at all. He listened to the faint lisping sound of grasses in the summer breeze, the sound of silken grasses touching each other lightly, and the rustle of flowers nodding together. Yes, it must be the daisy field. Then he heard the heels of the men who carried him striking sharply against the hard-packed sand of the road. He strained every nerve to catch the first indication of their turning. Neither to right nor left,

neither to north nor south. To his complete surprise, he was carried across the road and set carefully down in what he knew must be his own tournament grounds. It was a pleasant wave of excitement that swept over him. Ah—to use his brain again to elude his captors—he who had been left fearfully alone for many days, now taken once again. Quickly, to work! They could not escape from the amphitheater if they tried. But even as his brain evolved the faint beginnings of a plan for his freedom, he felt the bonds cut from him and the kerchief swung from his eyes with a flourish, and the loud din of many voices came upon him, calling the strange words, "The King—the King!"

The sight that met his eyes was so unexpected he gasped aloud, and then he began to laugh, tearfully, gaspingly, noisily as Friar Tuck laughed. He had never been so surprised, and never had he seen anything quite so comical as that which now confronted him. The arena had been decorated to look like a tournament field at court. The tiers of rocks were draped with colors thrown together in reckless disharmony—yellow and pea green, orange and magenta, purple and vermilion. And perched on the jutting ledges of rock was a gallery of fair ladies. Sawney, red faced, red haired, with blinking watery eyes and yellow lashes, was the Oueen of Beauty, seated on the most jutting rock of all, dressed in a gown of palish pink cut immodestly low. He had forgotten to put in the vest, so his hairy chest came brazenly to light in the midst of the delicate finery. He flirted a fan with his great brawny fist, fanning with a certain dogged, purposeful rhythm that was as unlike a lady's cov flirtings as possible. He suddenly crossed

his leg over his knee, showing an alarming array of thin bony leg, and then, remembering he had a part to play, he lifted a languid hand to his rose-decked hair and nodded his head mincingly with a wide grin of welcome. Holding forth his fan, he said, "Hi Master!"

"Oh, that is not the right way that I told thee at all," cried out one of the masked men indignantly, and Robin with a lithe movement tore the dark hats from the four golden heads of the youngest outlaws

in the band.

But there was so much to see, Robin Hood did not have time to ask them what they had been up to, how they had kept it all a secret, and the countless other things that must have attended their preparations. Here was Little John, the "queen mother" he called himself, wearing a gown that came just to his knees, with a train wired forth in mid-air like the tail of a strutting bird.

"Why is it thou wearest thy gown so short?" said Robin, knowing full well 'twas because of the giant

outlaw's height that no lady's gown would fit.

"That my train will not trail on the damp earth, good sire," said John with a mincing curtsy. "My squire giveth me an allowance and I needs must take care of my things," he added piously.

And then with a loud blowing of horn, in danced Friar Tuck, attired as a page in shimmering red satin that fitted him as tightly as a glove, accentuating the roundness of his little body, his capers showing off most beautifully without his clinging robes to interfere.

"The knights come, O King," he shouted. "Thou art to be judge," he cried. Robin Hood suffered himself

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to be lifted in many uneven and unsteady arms to the jutting rock beside the Queen of Beauty, to watch the mock tournament. And when the horses came into the ring who could do aught but laugh again? For they were not horses at all, but fat, strong pigs, ambling at a lazy gait, their riders sitting with feet outstretched upon their shiny backs.

And the fair ladies threw to the knights their tokens, garden vegetables tied into great bouquets, which the knights promptly fed to their steeds.

A minstrel in glowing checks of rainbow colors passed by, and the sweet, gay voice of Allin-a-Dale sang ballads of Robin Hood that had begun to circulate through all of England since the last well-known exploits of the famous outlaw.

Come, all you brave gallants, listen awhile,
With hey down, down, an a down,
That are this bower within;
For of Robin Hood, that archer good,
A song I intend for to sing.

Come, gentlemen all, and listen awhile,
Hey down, down, an a down,
And a story I'll to you unfold.
I'll tell how Robin Hood served the bishop
When he robbed him of his gold.

There was so much to watch at once—Friar Tuck unable to stop his dancing, as if he had swallowed some potent charm that gave a man dancing for a fever and turned him into a disciple of Saint Vitus, and Allin-a-Dale's songs that sparkled with wit and humor, and the stories of brave Robin Hood, and the wallowing pigs in

the center of the field, and Little John tripping over his feet with his train bouncing merrily along behind.

Sawney sat in a kind of a pleasant stupor with a smile of tolerance on his broad features, and a great hand fanning himself idly.

"A penny for thy thoughts, fair queen," said Robin.

"My thoughts are worth more than a penny," said the Scotchman, suddenly roused, "worth a rump roast, a barrel of wine—a—"

"Oh, thou hast a vast conceit!" said Will Stutely indignantly.

It was at that moment that a loud cry proclaimed George o' the Green the victor of the tournament, as the only man present who had not fallen off his steed. And the prize was brought forth, Will Scarlet—as sweet and dainty a maid as any in the land he looked, in shimmering royal blue that clung to his graceful form in soft folds, and his hair brought forward on his forehead in small golden ringlets in which he had inserted a circular band of shining stones. He hung his head demurely, but when he came near to George o' the Green, he gave a flying leap and with both his arms locked about the great pinder's neck, kissed him full upon the mouth, with his full weight hanging all the while and one foot coyly uplifted like a Mercury.

"Faith, a prize not so hard won as hard to win," moaned George o' the Green. "Hard upon thy back, at least!"

"And thy heart," said Will coyly, giving him a good buffet to show his love.

There was so much more of this rude horseplay—so many caperings 'twas as if Friar Tuck had started a

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school in capering—and Robin Hood by nightfall was weak with laughter and quite ready to go home to the Vale of Peace, even if it meant riding in the ridiculous daisy-covered chariot they had made for him.

"But there is not room for two," said Robin Hood, "and methinks 'tis the Queen of Beauty should ride."

"Dost thou wish to ride, Sawney?" said Will Stutely.

"I may as well save my footsteps," said the Scot, and for once they thought they saw a twinkle on his practical countenance; but none could surely say, as he was in the chariot in a twinkle, and the galloping outlaws appointed his horses were giving him such a fast and furious ride that he was heard to call, "'Tis a greater run for my money than I bargained for. Leave me my life, brave men!"

"Oh, what a joyous day!" said Robin Hood. "I have not felt so full of life for many a month. I had begun to forget that the greenwood is made for pranks and for play as well as for the more serious plans we have had of late."

"'Twas Midge's plan," said Peter eagerly.

"Hush," muttered Midge in great confusion.

"Thou needst not hide thyself, boy," smiled Robin Hood. "Thou hast cheered thy master this day and given him as much pleasure as he hath had since Richard visited Sherwood."

"Where is the good king now?" asked Midge,

hastily changing the subject.

"In France, going from town to town in Normandy, raiding and carrying on siege and skirmish. I fear there must be another war with France, though it is said that Richard hath declared truce for a year with Philip."

"It must be strange never to stay in a place long

enough to call it home," said Peter gently.

"All men are different, little Peter," said Robin Hood.
"What is happiness for us is unhappiness for others.
And perchance," the Master added in a strange voice,
"what is right for us is wrong to other men."

"Nay, Master, what thy heart says is true, I'll stake

my heart upon," said Little John loyally.

They went happily back to the Vale of Peace, passing through the dark corridors of Cathedral Lane for a moment's sweet communion. The birds sang in the dim twilight, and a soft breeze touched the cheeks of the outlaws as they murmured their vesper service.

"I like the summer best," sighed Will Stutely.

"Ah, yes, 'tis summer when the leaves be green that seemeth most truly made for the outlaws—nights like this, warm and mysterious in the half-light of evening, that give new life to Robin Hood's band," said Little John.

"New life," murmured Robin Hood.

"Master, thou dost not think there are not enough of us to carry on?" said Midge anxiously.

"Nay, Midge, I only wondered upon the remark of Little John. What is new life? Can we who are old and tired find it again on this earth?"

"Master, do not think such sad thoughts," cried Peter.

"'Tis not sad, boy. I only know that should I not find new life here on earth, I'll find it when I die," said Friar Tuck religiously.

"And I—I know not whether it shall ever come to me," smiled Robin Hood, "but I want no other life than

this. Familiar, weary though it may be, 'tis the life God gave to me—my precious span of years that I have lived alone."

"But, Master," said Will Scarlet with a curious bitterness that they had seen grow in him ever since he had bidden Maid Marian goodby, "if thou hast done thy task as thou seest it, and the other doth not carry it on, hath not thy life been a failure? Hark thou to what I mean. Thou hast lived for the Saxons, given up the sweetest thing in life, the love of a wondrous woman, so that the Virgin would fulfill thy dream, and now Richard has gone away again, sailed to Normandy to fight, forgotten England. Thou canst do no more, and yet the Saxons will not be any happier unless Richard careth to carry out thy dreams."

"Speak not bitterly, Will. Thy cry is the cry of youth that wisheth to see accomplishment with its own eyes. I think that life giveth each of us a task—or a dream. We bend each moment to it. Our hearts beat for it alone. We create and work and finally have done all that we can do. That is fulfillment. It doth not so much matter if the task be done. Who are we to take other men's dreams away that ours may find full blossoming? Richard's heart seeketh other things than the building of an England. I can but think that I have done my task in bending all of my life to its fulfillment, even if it is not truly done for many years to come."

A look of peace and serenity had come upon Robin Hood's face. His kindly spirit was a soft covering over his followers. They sensed the mystery of life. They whose normal hearts thought only upon practical affairs, they who had always leaped back if words became too

serious, were suddenly eager to learn the answer to the wonders about them. But they did not voice their thoughts. Silently each man brooded upon the thin flame of life within him, life that enabled him to see the beauty of a summer evening, to do brave deeds, to love and find love.

Sawney and the outlaws who had galloped him home had built a fire on the shore of the little lake. Home welcomed them. Brown October ale. Savory meats across the open fire. Here was comfort and contentment for the asking.

"Oh, summertime!" said Friar Tuck ardently.

"Are we to hear another sermon preached this night like that we heard upon the trees one other day?" yawned Will Stutely.

And Allin-a-Dale strummed lightly his guitar and sang in the full sweet voice they loved:

In summertime, when leaves grow green, And flowers are fresh and gay, Robin Hood and his merry men Were disposed to play.

"'Tis a season that maketh me restless," cried Will Scarlet, turning his face away from them.

"His heart grieveth," thought Robin Hood, "for the merry, sweet Maid Marian. She will come back to him, and this parting cannot hurt him. 'Twill make him more tender when she cometh, take a little of the sharp egotism away that his handsome charm hath given him. Hearts that grieve for other hearts!" He thought suddenly that his heart had never longed for another beyond that of the Queen of Heaven. Had he missed a treasured part of life? His questioning thoughts were stilled. The

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only treasure in any life was that thing that filled a man's heart and thoughts so that he noticed not the long and oftentimes gloomy circuit of days that turned to months and hence to years. For Peter, perchance, it was the singing of the deep, mysterious sea, for that alone soothed the boy in lonely hours and lifted him to exaltation. For Will Scarlet, it was a woman, the slim Lady Marian with her sweetly curved mouth like the two wings of flying birds against the distant skies. For Little John, it was the outlaw band and Robin Hood. For the King, voyages of dark passion and adventure; for Queen Eleanor, the distant songs of the troubadours of Provence that brought back to her a young heart and a host of love.

He looked into the flaming firelight and saw again that golden moment in the forest when the Virgin had come to him in a dream—come to him as truly as when he had sought her out in cloistered halls. She it was who had made life possible for him, had made the lonely tempestuous span of years a cherished memory.

THE END OF SINGING BIRDS

"Whoo-wu-chickadee," practiced Peter, pursing his lips so that they made a round O. "Is that better, Friar Tuck? Doth that sound like a true forest call?"

"Nay, it soundeth like a boy trying to sing like a bird," said the friar discouragingly.

And then he made another attempt, still more frail,

"Hu-hu-chickadee."

"Come here, thou child of the sea, and make us the sound of a sunfish," said Friar Tuck jovially. "Or perchance that was the sound of the sea gull thou gavest."

Peter and Midge sat on a great log and for the next

hour or two made bird-like noises at each other.

"What is the billing and cooing all about?" they heard a laughing voice over their shoulders. "Hungry, little ones?" and a big fat worm was lowered over their upturned mouths, so that they screamed and rolled over and over on the greensward to get away. But who could get away from Little John? He chased them hither and thither while they screamed with delight, clambering up tall trees, slipping on moss-covered rocks, breathless and hot.

In their wild flight they came upon Will Scarlet lying beside a clear little dell of water flagged with flat white stones where purple iris grew between the cracks.

"Looking in the pool like Narcissus, I'll wager," said Little John stopping to gaze scornfully down upon handsome Will.

"Who was Narcissus?" asked Midge, ever curious.

"A boy who gazed into a pool of water and found himself beautiful," said Little John.

"Humph! He should have been a lady," said Midge scornfully.

But at that moment Will Scarlet, who had been dragging one white hand back and forth across the pool's sparkling surface, lifted it suddenly into the air, and the three were drenched with water.

And now the chase began again—across creek, down lane, up hill, over thorns and brambles. And as play like this was the most catching thing in the outlaw camp next to drowsiness, soon half the band were on the trail of the streak of scarlet that was Will. Even Robin Hood, who could still catch the hunted more quickly than any, since he knew the short cuts and the quickest ways to climb up hill and dale, joined them, and he it was who soon held the captive by the nape of his neck.

"Dip him in yon pool, Master," they shouted, and Will was lowered ceremoniously into the shining waters until his golden head disappeared. They placed him on the bank and, all gathering round, watched him choke and sputter.

"Frog in the throat, young fellow? 'Tis a shame," cried Friar Tuck in his most pious tones.

"Feeling a little hoarse?" asked Sawney with never a twinkle.

"He is wheezing like a bellows," said Midge anxiously.

"And sputtering like a kettle," said Little John wickedly.

Will Scarlet could not answer them. He had to choke a little longer.

It was Robin Hood who saw that the dainty fellow could bear little more of this teasing, and who suddenly cried for attention from the band.

"'Tis long since we have had a business council," smiled the chief. "I bid ye come in an hour's time to the Vale of Peace where we shall discuss the affairs of our treasury. Will Stutely, wilt thou act as page to all members of the band of Robin Hood, that all may surely be present?"

"Aye, Master," said Will Stutely importantly.

"In an hour's time, mark ye, ye idlers," laughed the Master as he disappeared into the dark thickets of the forest.

"Perchance we have no money," said Peter anxiously.

"'Tis true we have not held up a wealthy noble or a high ecclesiastic for many a long day," mused Little John.

When Robin Hood came forth from the embowered cottage an hour later, he saw the Vale of Peace turned into a veritable village green. Half the band were playing leap frog, the last leap sending the man who played frog into the lake. Others were playing quoits, and the most skillful archers among them were shooting an apple off Friar Tuck's head, though he shook so with fear 'twas much more of a feat than they had considered when they started.

After blowing his horn, Robin Hood said, "Come, rogues and playfellows! Gather in a great circle and take ye the most comfortable positions ye can, for this meeting threatens to last a good while."

Dropping their games they sat in a circle, and put their heads in one another's laps and leaned back to back, and, in faith, turned their joyous games of a moment before into a new game of sitting and being comfortable.

"Hi, thou ticklest me! Get away!" cried Arthur-a-Bland.

"Let me lean my wee head on thy brawny shoulder," said Little John to Nicholas the cook.

"Hold my elbow up. 'Tis tired of leaning," said Friar Tuck imperiously.

At last Robin Hood was able to stop laughing long enough to call them to order again. Save for a few stirrings and suppressed snickers, the outlaws were ready to join in the business council.

"I have been thinking," said Robin Hood, "that the work of the band of Robin Hood seemeth almost to be done. Richard is on the throne, and the Saxons have the greatest opportunity they have had for a century to lift their heads to the sun. For some time I have wondered if perchance we should disband, that such as Midge and Peter who are still young boys might start new lives while life is easy for the Saxons. And thus it hath occured to me that the great treasure that we have accumulated during our many years, the treasury that holdeth the surplus of gold that hath remained after we have given to the poor and needy, the ill-gotten wealth of nobles, the stolen goods of ecclesiastics, and other tainted monies that we have taken from lawless owners, should be given to Little John to divide equally among us."

"But, Master, what would we do with money? Thy talk of disbanding is not to be thought upon, is it, brothers?" cried Will Stutely.

"Nay, nay!" they cried earnestly, completely sobered from their play at the idea of such a thing.

Robin Hood looked thoughtful, but he continued speaking at once. "I shall not argue, then, brethren. Even as the thought came to me that 'tis time for me to leave you and have you elect a new captain, I knew somehow that your loyalty to me was so great you would not wish it. Then let the outlaw band of Robin Hood continue. But this does not change my desire to break the treasury this day and give to each of you a share of all booty we have taken in the past years. 'Tis my earnest desire that each of you have a small fortune to call his own."

"But, Master, Will Stutely is right. What would we do with it? Where can we spend it? Why should we wish a private sum of money for our own?" said Midge.

"Because, lad, there are things that we each can do to give happiness — things we do not wish to share, perchance, with a hundred other men, even though they be our most-loved friends. With my share I would build a shrine for Lady Mary in the cloisters of Newstead Abbey. Thou rememberest my hatred for that monastery? Planted by Henry II to grow into a thing of beauty that would shade his wicked part in the murder of Saint Thomas á Becket, the abbey seemed to me a false and terrible monument. But now my life seemeth to have rounded out and closed the circle of despair that seized me when I was a little child at the altar of Canterbury Cathedral where the great archbishop lay dead. All the fierce struggle in my heart for a Saxon England is gone. The abbey seemeth to me the home of the Virgin, and not the work of a sly king's pricking conscience. I think, if you muse upon it, you will find there is some monument that you would like to build."

"I'd like a great farm in barren Scotland with good fat hogs upon it and a flock of snowy sheep," said Sawney dreamily.

The outlaws laughed loudly and a little unkindly at Sawney's idea of a monument. The Scot flushed a little and turned troubled eyes upon his master. Robin Hood stilled the tactless laughter with a stern frown and uplifted hand.

"Brethren," he said, "religion to me is life. The best that I know about the world is that man should meet life honestly, and thus he meeteth his God honestly. If Sawney longs for a little piece of lonely land in Scotland instead of a shrine in some old cloistered abbey, then let him say it. 'Tis far more true a thing than for him to pretend that giving a shrine is a pretty thing to do. And a bit of property is as much a monument as any lovely image, for it is a real part of a greater monument, the nation."

They hung their heads that they had laughed at one of their own. Midge touched the hand of Sawney gently, and the old Scotchman grunted something in a gruff, uneasy voice, and blinked his eyes that were so watery at all times they knew not if he wept.

"But, Master, our treasury will have no gold to help the poor, should we need it," said Midge anxiously.

"But we shall soon have more, boy. 'Tis activity the band of Robin Hood needs. We do not wish to be branded common thieves, nor do we wish to steal from travelers of the highway for the sake of something to do, but there still exist men in the high positions of this nation that are not living lives of honesty and uprightness. There still is a corrupt and false fiber of rottenness in the church, among the Normans, in the local governments of towns, in every shire and hamlet. Our constant war upon these people hath ceased since Richard's visit here some months ago. I think, comrades, if we are to effect the subtlest of changes in England, it must be done by the eternal hammering of our point, for simple minds learn only by repetition and constant warning. If we continue to play highwaymen to those who carry ill-gotten gains, and they fear us more and more, the day may come when they would rather give up their gold entirely than hand it over to one of the men of Robin Hood. 'Tis that day we seek.'

So now that they heard their master's reasons, they found that they were indeed glad to have each a little fortune of his own, for so it turned out to be when the booty was divided among them. And Will Scarlet smiled happily, knowing that should Lady Fitzwalter consent to be his bride, he could treat her royally and buy her the lovely velvet gowns, all colors of the rainbow, that she could not but love in her dainty feminine soul. And Midge took his little heap of gold and tied it carefully into a pouch to take to his father, since the mill still had many things that needed attention since its burning. Old Nicholas wiped his eyes openly, and he told them of a little dark-eyed child in France waiting for her grandfather, the only living relative she had, to send for her. Each man found something special in his heart. Robin Hood was right. There were deeds one longed to do alone, acts of love that could not be shared even though the sharers were the dearest comrades of the heart. And the castles in the air around Sherwood that night would have formed a veritable battlement.

Robin Hood lay wakeful in the sleeping camp. For the first time since that other night some months before when he had awakened to find a dagger of pain in his heart, he was wholly content. He had done all the things he feared might be left undone should death come upon him suddenly. He thanked God that he had been given strength to live until he saw Richard, until he aided the King in his siege of Nottingham and told His Majesty his dream for the Saxons. He knew that even if Richard did not devote his time and energy to the recreating of England, the words of the famous outlaw would always ring in his ears, and he would forget that the fate of the Saxons was serfdom, and recognize their heritage should they lift their voices to uphold it. He was glad that he had thought to give each outlaw his share of the treasures of their camp. If he had died too soon, they would have taken it all and built him a great monastery out of the deep love of their hearts. It was better that he could die knowing that each of his hundred loyal men would live in safety and comfort all his life. Life seemed very sweet as he lay there. He could scarcely bear to sleep these summer nights. He did not want to miss these last full moments of clear beauty—bright stars and singing birds and the mystery of the forest.

It was gray dawn when Little John found Robin

Hood waking him with rough hands.

"What is it, Master? What is it?" he cried, half-dazed with sleep, yet wholly conscious that his master's face was drawn with pain and weariness. "What hath happened?"

Even as he spoke the lines of torment relaxed and Robin Hood smiled bravely at him. "'Tis all right again, comrade." It was another moment before he could go on. "For some months, Little John, a cruel pain hath struck me powerless on various occasions. 'Tis like a dagger in the heart twisting my life away, and then when it is unendurable, it goeth as suddenly as it came. I think it meaneth that I must leave thee soon."

Little John's face lost every vestige of color. He lay so still that it was almost as if he had died. The two men looked long into each other's eyes. Love and understanding passed between them. Then the old look of fear came into Little John's face, fear of death and the mystery he could not understand.

"Death—Master?" he said in a low whisper.

"A sharp pain and the end of singing birds—that is all, dear friend."

"But, Master, it cannot be," the great outlaw cried, suddenly springing to his feet in a frenzy of activity. "We shall go at once to a certain nunnery called Kirkley in the deanery of Pontefract, in Yorkshire between Halifax and Wakefield, where the Calder flows. The prioress there is a woman greatly skilled in leech-craft. Let her bleed thee, I prithee, Master. She hath saved many lives, I am told."

"Nay, nay, Little John. It can do me no good." And for the first time Robin Hood's voice was filled with weariness. "Thou knowest I have never been well since my journey for the Saxons throughout England. I should like to think I gave my life for them," he added wistfully.

"Thou needst not die, Master." Little John's calm voice came reassuringly through the gray mists of early morning. "Thou must get well. We need thee."

So it was that Robin Hood promised to go with Little John on that very day to the nunnery called Kirkley Hall, and they agreed to tell none of the band why they were going, but to slip off as they were accustomed to do very often for a day of adventure and change.

"We shall not leave until afternoon, please, Little John," said Robin Hood. "I wish to speak to each one of the outlaws this day. If I call them together in meeting, their sensitive hearts will guess that something

is wrong."

"As you wish, dear Master," said Little John, and then set about waking the younger members of the band with as much gayety as he could summon, that they should not guess that his heart was well-nigh broken with grief and worry, and that it almost seemed as if a part of him had died when Robin Hood had wakened him that gloomy early dawn to tell him the sorrowful words.

"Wake up, lazy bug-little sleepiness," he said

shaking Midge by one thin, pointed shoulder.

"Wake up, early bird, wake up," he continued, as he went leaping from thicket to thicket arousing the sleeping outlaws.

"'Tis too early, far too early," said Friar Tuck with

a great yawn.

"Too early for what?" sighed Will Stutely in a daze of sleep.

"Nay, too late—too late for matins, Friar Tuck.

Shame on thee!" teased Robin Hood.

Little John felt as if his expression must betray the secret his heart kept. He was afraid to look up from his task of waking the still dreaming Peter.

"Little John," he heard his master call.

He knew not what Robin Hood said. He only knew that it was a message that meant to say "Be of good cheer, comrade. Hold thy head high. Play thy part for thy master well." And when he looked into Robin Hood's face, he saw the same kindly, beautiful countenance. And only the slightly drawn look about the older man's eyes told his faithful comrade that the scene in the early dawn had not been only a terrible dream.

All through the day Robin Hood was here and there, once more a shadow before the sun, Puck circling the forest in thirty seconds; again the phantom Robin Hood moving with the speed and elusiveness that proclaimed him either an immortal or the cleverest man alive.

But the outlaws thought nothing of his brief moment with them on that fateful day, as none of them knew until a long time after, of his tremendous task in seeking them all out.

Will Scarlet looked up from his gloomy preoccupation to find his master looking down at him with half-tender, half-laughing eyes.

"Come thou, love-sick. Be of good cheer. She will come back to thee. I have it by all I know of life, and also by a dream wherein I see ye laughing together over a bit of venison roasted too brown. Learn thou, Will, that maidens must be a little difficult—withdraw awhile to look into the wondrous depths of their pretty hearts, and sigh awhile for things they think they've missed, and grieve a little at the mystery of love. After, they give. And then watch out, dear lad. They give with that graciousness that maketh the plainest man a king, that maketh the crossest man an angel, that maketh the ugliest man handsome. This brief denial, this brief

unrest and loneliness, is but the prelude to a long happiness."

Will Scarlet smiled a young shaky smile at his master, and said in a quavering voice, "Dost thou really think all that, Robin?"

"Of course, coz." And Robin Hood was gone again, so that Will blinked his eyes and wondered if the whole thing had been a vision. He sank back again on the moss to think sweet thoughts of Lady Marian.

Friar Tuck stood all alone in Cathedral Lane. His cheery smile was gone. He knit his brow with a deep, perplexed expression. He knelt suddenly before a giant oak and burst into a prayer that he rattled off so quickly not a word of it could be understood.

"What—what can this be?" cried Robin Hood appearing suddenly from over the hill.

"I'm saying them fast to make up for all the times I've missed," said Friar Tuck gloomily.

"Thy conscience—" Robin Hood left the word in mid-air, where it seemed to caper and then fall gloomily to earth.

"Master, dost thou think that I have sinned against the holy cloth by dancing about—and—oh, thou knowest how I have acted," sighed the Friar.

"Of course not, friar. Thou hast only been merry, as the Virgin tells us to be. Religion doth not mean sobriety of mood, but sobriety of deed. And goodness is not in the holy cloth, dear friend, but in the heart. Oftentimes I've thought that I should wear a cowl and turn monk. But somehow that would take away the power that the love I bear the Virgin giveth me. 'Tis not the love of God that doth matter so much, friend,

but the sense of power that love giveth thee. Love that cleanseth and washeth clean the heart, love that covereth thee with its wings of peace, only such a love as that can give thee the power to walk uprightly among men, and to soothe and aid them in time of trouble."

"Then caper I will again," cried the irrepressible Friar Tuck. And caper he did, in spinning circles so that when his dizziness passed away and he could see again, Robin Hood was gone from him as swiftly as he'd come.

And each man had from Robin Hood on that soft summer day some special intimate thing for himself alone to remember.

"Some day, little Peter, thou must go to sea, for a longing that singeth each night in thy ears until sleep comes, an ever-present dream of Stella Maris watching the sailors tossing in their frail crafts, should become a reality. Do not fear changes. Do not think that because thou hast found deep happiness in the greenwood thou canst not find it elsewhere too. Learn to break life sharply off. Leave certain joy for uncertain. Farewell to surety that submergeth thee."

And Will Stutely listened to a mild reproof of his irresponsible nature and a word of praise for his unending loyalty, for had he not been with the outlaw band even before Little John and Will Scarlet? Had he not come to follow Robin as a ragged little Saxon boy of scarce a dozen years?

Robin Hood met Little John in the appointed place and silently mounted the charger made ready for him. There were no goodbys to be said. No grief attended his departure. It was as if he and Little John were stealing quietly away for a holiday, and Robin Hood knew that if they were missed no outlaw would worry, as it had been frequently in days gone by their master's habit to disappear without warning.

"Dost thou remember our trip to Wakefield when we went to seek George o' the Green?" laughed Robin

Hood.

"Aye, yes," said Little John merrily, for he had vowed that Robin Hood should not know of his aching heart. "And wilt thou ever forget how the two young damsels caught Will Scarlet in the thread from their spinning and said that it meant they would marry one of his same name?"

"May poor Will hear the marriage bells soon!" said Robin Hood tenderly. "He groweth pale and thin with his long waiting. 'Tis certain the maiden will return to him, but 'tis hard that the lad should have to bear this indecision."

"Doth it not seem strange to think that the sheriff of Nottingham is no more, and that Sir Guy of Gisborne is but a name to be vaguely recalled?"

"Strange indeed. Sometimes it seemeth that half the adventures we have had in past days are but myths like tales of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. I wonder if that good king ever lived, and if such men as Galahad and Launcelot rode through the land even as we are riding today, Little John!"

"Perchance all history turneth into myth," said the outlaw. "Who knoweth but that Ulysses really hid in the wooden horse at Troy. Perchance the sad and wistful Iseult really sat in a high tower grieving for brave Tristam. Some day the world will sing of Robin Hood,

and men will think that thou didst live only in the pages of a book."

"It mattereth little," smiled Robin Hood. "But hath it not been fun, like the playing of a prank upon the future people in England, Little John, to leave our names upon the very soil of England for eternity? Nothing doth linger like a name, for children learn it from their fathers and hence it goeth on down through the generations. Little John's Field at Whitby, Robin Hood's Bay at Scarborough—I chuckle to think of those future map makers of the land who painfully print my name in colored inks. Will they ponder upon us then, Little John, and say to each other, 'He must have lived, for see, men have named their possessions after him'?"

"May we go past Newstead Abbey on the way?" asked Little John. And he said this that Robin Hood might know that the day was his, to stop for communion with his adored Queen of Heaven if he wished, or to fare straight on to Wakefield if he so desired.

Robin Hood smiled at Little John and answered, "Let us go straightway to the nunnery, comrade. The Lady Mary is close beside me this day. I see her plainly, and I need not the closer sense of her presence that her image giveth me. Let us go on, so that when weary nighttime falls I may give myself into the hands of the prioress to be healed."

Little John rejoiced that his master seemed to think the prioress might aid him. They spurred their chargers on, and the swift gallop along the sunlit road was like an exhilarating race. The two sat straight in their saddles, and the shadows falling upon them made them look larger than they really were, so that peasants who saw them flash by on the roadside ran home to the safety of their little farms and told of giant riders whose horses flew above the road at a breathless speed instead of galloping on the white dust itself.

Kirkley Hall stood primly back from the highway, surrounded by a graceful forest of slender trees quite unlike the giant oaks and yews of most of the woods in England. It was as if the trees were made for slender, gentle nuns to move beneath, back and forth, holding their little prayer books, swinging their beads and chains. Slim trees for slim, gracious women. Great yew trees would have loomed crushingly above these gentle souls.

The prioress who met them was a tall, dignified woman with coal-black hair that swept back from her brows as if the wind were blowing it. Her dark eyes were heavy, with drooping lids and long black lashes that fringed her pale cheeks a good deal of the time. This habit of hiding her eyes from them gave her presence an air of mystery. Little John, who never remembered in his whole life being influenced by a woman's beauty, found himself shivering as he watched her pale loveliness. Robin Hood's eyes were hidden as her own. He stared unseeing at the stone flaggings, and at last roused himself to her offers of food and drink, saying, "Nay, good nun, I will neither eat nor drink till I am bled by thee."

Little John was told to stay below for the night, as his master must not be disturbed until the following day, else harm might result from the bleeding.

Robin Hood followed the white nun with the dark shadowy hair up a winding staircase. He followed her still farther down a long corridor and into a small tower room as lonely as a hilltop. "Thy name is Robin Hood?" said the prioress with a

strange wild gleam in her dark eyes.

"Aye," said Robin, wondering vaguely how it was she knew that it was he, and remembering at once that Little John had made no move to hide their identities when he begged the prioress to bleed the outlaw chief.

She went quietly about her task, rolling the sleeve of his jerkin up nearly to his shoulder. She looked at the veins in his arm with an air of almost eager appraisal. She cut crossways, a deep gash that was suddenly scarlet on his brown arm.

She gazed at him with her tragic eyes, now shining with triumph. Her thin, cruel lips spoke to him. In a daze of weakness he heard them speak, as if they were lips apart from any body, thin lips that were indeed so cruel they surely could belong to no human person.

"I shall bury thee by the roadside where thou hast been accustomed to despoil my noble people of Normandy. I shall bury thee on the highway, that the great and rich men of the land may know that they can now travel in peace."

He did not try to explain to her. He did not cry aloud or call out misery upon her. He looked at her with patient, gentle eyes that forgave the distorted impulses of her heart—eyes that told her more than any words could say, if she had stopped to read them.

She did not stop. She whirled from the room, a tall ghost with curious black wings flying away from her pale face.

For a long time Robin Hood lay motionless. The warm blood poured from his wound, and he lay in a state of stupor, unthinking and unafraid. It was hours

later that a numbness all over his body made itself felt. His mind, singularly clear, told him he was bleeding to death, that the nun had not bandaged his wound but had left the veins untied so that the life blood poured from him. His eyes sought the casement door. It was half ajar, but though he crawled and bent every effort he could not reach it. Finally he gave up his attempts and sank back again into the half stupor that was so nearly death. But again his mind cleared. He longed to see Little John again. Little John became the spark of hope that kept him alive, the link between life and death. His frail hands found his horn and with slow patience he lifted it gradually to his dry, parched lips. No sound came at first. He shut his eyes and thought of the hundreds of times he had blown this trusty horn, how he had cut the air with sharp imperative blasts, how he had sung with the breeze in full rich tones. Another effort, a supreme effort, for Little John and for a peaceful death. Three faint blasts threaded the room, like the weak cries of a small child. But to Robin Hood the three calls were, "Little John! Little John! Little John!"

In the open court below, Little John had paced all the night through without rest or desire to sleep. His heavy heart was like a stone in his breast. He could neither pray nor rest nor weep. Only walking—walking in the darkness of night, waiting, waiting for his master. The three blasts smote his consciousness like three loud cries. The message of death reached him so quickly it was a full moment before he realized that the blasts had been so weak they must have been blown in the last sighing of life. He broke locks here, crashed windows there, leaped staircases, flung open doors. He came,

wild-eyed and breathless, to Robin Hood. Flinging himself to his knees beside his master, he murmured crooning words of love. Little John, whose slow deliberate words had always been tempered with restraint, flung off the habits of a lifetime and cried like a child.

"A boon, a boon, Robin!" he said at last, with a note

of cold hatred in his voice.

"What boon, Little John, dost thou beg of me?" said Robin Hood in a far-off dream.

"Let me burn fair Kirkley Hall," cried Little John bitterly. "Let the nunnery lie in ruins when dawn comes. Let the feminine, cringing trees out yonder turn to ashes. Let the evil woman of cold beauty, the Norman prioress who so misjudged thee, be consumed like a witch burned

at the stake, charred by a terrible flame."

"Nay, nay," Robin Hood raised his weak voice and half-lifted himself in his earnestness. "Such a boon is not worthy of thee, Little John. I never have hurt women in all my life, nor man in woman's company. Fair maidens, children of the Virgin, have danced untouched upon the shining earth when Robin Hood was near. The cold nun's heart beats for the Normans even as thy master's heart once beat for the Saxons, so terribly. so blindly, that I too wished to slay. Only Heaven saved me from having the lives of men upon my conscience this day, Little John, and saved me through the death of the great kind-hearted father who was all I had. Perchance this Norman woman hath never suffered. And now she will, Little John. Mine eyes will haunt her in her dreams. She will be afraid. Her cold heart will cry, and she will be a little child again, seeking the Virgin, begging for forgiveness."

"But she shall never be forgiven, never have a moment's peace again," cried Little John.

"Nay, Little John. The Queen of Heaven will take her in her arms and kiss her brow and smooth her dark hair blown in the wind away from her wild brow, and peace will come—such peace, Little John, as I have had."

"What shall I tell them, Master—Midge and Peter, whose frail and sensitive souls will be crushed beneath this blow? Will Scarlet, who will want to give up all earthly pleasures to be more like thee, even though it meaneth the forsaking of Maid Marian? Will Stutely, who will never laugh again?"

"Hush, Little John. None of that shall be. The men of Robin Hood are too big to rebel thus against the laws of nature. Have I not taught thee always to be unafraid of death, of needful change, of breaking old bonds for new? Courageous lives? Only a swift sharp pain and the end of singing birds, Little John. Say that to my outlaw band, and they will remember how I have said it to them many times before. Do not try to hold the band together longer, Little John. Let them scatter. Let these years with me be but a sacred memory for them, done for all time except in recollection. And after awhile the pain will go—the harsh tearing, like ligament away from bone—the unbound wound that light and air and water only wounds the more. Healing will set in, knitting together, sealing over, so that only scars remain."

"Master, Master," whispered Little John.

And then a change came upon Robin Hood, as if all of life that was left flowed together, giving him a moment of fierce energy before his death. But even as his body gained in strength, the clear crystal vision of his mind

was gone. Or was it gone? Little John was never to know whether his master's words were voiced in his

delirium or spoken in mighty truth.

"The Virgin smiles on me—smiles with the winged mouth of little Marian. She tells me to be merry. See, I laugh, Little John—sweet laughter for the sake of Lady Mary. And Hereward, with his golden hair, stamps on ahead. Oh, I say thee, wait! There is no need of fighting still. The work is done. See, there are the Saxons standing in the sun, all golden like their hair. Yes, Father, Lincoln green, for Saxon green hath too much yellow in it to blend well with the thickets. Lincoln green that is the deep leaf-color of the forest. 'Tis Sherwood, thou sayest, that will hold more than a hundred men in hiding? Little John, Little John, I say thee, bring me my bow and arrow. I would shoot againfor the golden arrow, nay—for my grave, Little John. Bury me where the arrow lighteth. Let me have length and breadth beneath the ground as I have had above, and lay my bent bow by my side. 'As crooked as Robin Hood's bow,' and thou laughest at that, Sir Guy? Hush, I wish not to hear thy voice. Music, Little John—is it Allin-a-Dale I hear? Oh, see! The arrow flieth straight toward the morning sun. And the birds still sing, comrade. Tell them all - Midge, and the friar, and Will—all, all of them—the birds still sing!"

A whirring arrow flying through the air. As its sharp point pierced the soil, Robin Hood crumpled into a heap, as if he had shot himself in shooting the fair green earth, as if he and his England were one.

THE END

